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WON BY WAITING.

WON BY WAITING

BY

EDNA LYALL

AUTHOR OF

'DONOVAN,' 'WE TWO,' 'IN THE GOLDEN DAYS.'

'Man's weakness waiting upon God
  Its end can never miss,
For men on earth no work can do
  More angel-like than this.

. . . . .

Ill that He blesses is our good,
  And unblest good is ill;
And all is right that seems most wrong,
  If it be His sweet Will.'—*Faber.*

Seventh Edition.

IN ONE VOLUME.

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DEDICATED

WITH MUCH LOVE, TO

T. B. W. AND F. A. W.

WON BY WAITING.

CHAPTER I.

> 'One adequate support
> For the calamities of mortal life
> Exists, one only!—an assured belief
> That the procession of our fate, howe'er
> Sad or disturbed, is ordered by a Being
> Of infinite benevolence and power,
> Whose everlasting purposes embrace
> All accidents, converting them to good.'
>
> *The Excursion.*

THE Château de Mabillon stood on the summit of a low but abrupt hill, overlooking one of the most beautiful valleys of France. In appearance it was scarcely habitable, for it had suffered greatly in the Revolution; and though time had veiled the rough work of the incendiaries with luxuriant ivy and creepers, the château was but a ruin, with the exception of a few rooms which had escaped the general devastation, and were still occupied by the De Mabillon family.

Very small had that family become of late years, dwindling as rapidly almost as their fortune had diminished. Alphonse de Mabillon, at the age of five-and-forty, found himself the sole survivor of his generation—brothers and sisters were all dead, more distant relatives had emigrated, and were thus lost to him, his little English wife had drooped and died long ago, and he was now left alone, save for his two children.

The villagers and the *curé* wondered at Monsieur's grave, sad face, but they all loved him, for he was the very impersonation of gentleness and kindness, and gave more in alms than many a far richer man.

On the brow of the hill, surrounding the château on all sides, was a broad terrace, upon which M. de Mabillon might have been seen one autumn afternoon, pacing up and down. His face was more than ordinarily grave, his head bent as if in anxious thought; so engrossed was he, that he did not even notice the ringing of the vesper bell, in the convent below the hill, although this was the wonted sign for the appearance of his little daughter.

Espérance was full of wonder as, accompanied by old Javotte the servant, she climbed the steep ascent to the château. Her studies at the convent were over for the day, and she was making all speed to join her father —why was he not watching for her as usual? What made him look so grave and anxious? She reached the terrace out of breath, and sprang to her father's side with a merry laugh.

'Why, papa! you have forgotten me, and I have given you a surprise.'

'For once,' replied her father, smiling and stooping to kiss the little, flexible mouth which was pretending to pout; 'I have much to think of just now, my child.'

Espérance looked puzzled.

'What can there be to think of, now that the harvest is over, and the vintage, too, and Gaspard, our good Gaspard, has passed his examination?—tell me what makes you grave, papa.'

M. de Mabillon paused for a minute, then, instead of answering the question, said, 'Gaspard will live at Paris now, you know; how would you like to live there, too?'

At Paris!' exclaimed Espérance wonderingly, 'and

leave the château? Oh! no, papa, we could not live in a great town, away from all the woods and the flowers. Besides, I love the sisters—except, indeed, Sœur Thérèse, who is cross always—I could not bear to leave them.'

'You will try to bear it for my sake, will you not?' asked her father.

Espérance turned pale.

'Do you mean, papa, that we must really go quite away from home, and leave everything?'

'Dear child, it is indeed thus; I have kept it from you as long as possible, but I have had losses of late; the vintage was, as you know, very bad, and Gaspard's education has been a great expense; we cannot afford to live here any longer, so the château and land are to be sold, and we must try to live cheaply with your brother at Paris.'

Espérance did not attempt to hide her tears, but she struggled to check them for her father's sake. The understanding between father and daughter was perfect, and Espérance, though only fourteen, was a real companion to M. de Mabillon; he knew her innermost heart.

They talked long together over their future plans, and Espérance was comforted by the trust and confidence which he placed in her, and yet more by the perception of his calm, unshaken faith in the great Right which governed all changes.

Long years after his words rested in her memory; surely there are in many hearts, words and scenes so deeply impressed that nothing can efface them, truly God-given memories—possessions for life. Espérance could always recall the close of that autumn day—the sun setting behind the Auvergne mountains—the shadows gathering in the beautiful valley below—the river hurrying on its way, bearing on its bosom the reflection of a cloud,

crimson with sunset glory—the beautiful old château, with its ivy-covered walls—above all, her father's face, grave no longer, but full of the most serene trust, his eyes looking straight into hers, lovingly and confidently.

'Papa!' she cried impetuously, 'I love you so dearly, that I shall be happy always where you are, I shall not mind leaving the château.'

'That will do for the present, but you will grow to something higher by-and-by,' was M. de Mabillon's quiet answer; a riddle, indeed, to Espérance, but one which needed solving, sooner than either father or daughter expected.

Hitherto Espérance's life had been singularly uneventful. The neighbourhood was small and quiet, and M. de Mabillon, as a member of the *Eglise Reformée*, was cut off from what little society was to be had. Ever since Espérance could remember, she had read every day with her father, played in the old, neglected garden, talked to imaginary sisters, and helped old Javotte, the maid-servant, in her domestic duties; while each afternoon there was the visit to the convent, a music lesson from Sœur Angélique, who was young and pretty, and a long lesson in needlework from Sœur Thérèse, who has been already stigmatised as 'cross.' Now and then M. de Mabillon would take her to the nearest town to visit one of his few friends, but such treats were rare, and the unclouded happiness of Espérance's childhood arose entirely from the love and sympathy between her and her father, apart from all other pleasures.

She was cheerful and buoyant by nature, and the news of the afternoon did not weigh upon her, though to a certain extent she felt it. Having left her father in the garden, she ran into the château to find Javotte, actually singing as she went.

Javotte, a middle-aged woman, with little, black eyes, and a complexion brown and wrinkled with care and exposure, looked up as Espérance entered the kitchen, and said in a grating but not really disagreeable voice, 'Ah, well, ma'mselle! there are people who can always sing; when you are as old as I am——'

'I shall sing just as much,' interrupted Espérance, laughing. 'But after all, Javotte, I do not feel quite like singing to-night, only you see it is no good to sit down and cry; dear old Javotte, you will come with us, will you not? Now say "yes," directly—do not clear your throat!'

Javotte, however, was in no condition for speaking. She finished making an omelette before venturing to begin, and then with many gesticulations, opened her heart to Espérance.

'It is this way, my child—Monsieur tells me of the change which comes, and at once I say to myself, "I love Ma'mselle and Monsieur, and M. Gaspard, they go—then I must go also;" and again I say to myself, "I love my son Pierre, he stays here, then I must stay." *Voilà!* Ma'mselle, how can I choose, then, between these two?'

'Pierre could come too,' said Espérance, quickly. 'Indeed, Javotte, I cannot live without you; have you not often said how my mother asked you to love me and care for me, before she died, and will you leave me now to go away alone?'

Javotte could not resist such an appeal; after all, she thought, Pierre would no doubt marry, and then she would not be wanted—yes, she would accompany Ma'mselle till death.

Espérance, disregarding the foreboding tone of the last word, promised to dance at Pierre's wedding, and ran away to impart the good news to her father.

CHAPTER II.

'No shade has come between
Thee and the sun;
Like some long childish dream,
Thy life has run.
But now the stream has reached
A dark, deep sea,
And sorrow, dim and crowned,
Is waiting thee.'

A. A. Proctor.

Javotte felt the change more than any one else. Perhaps the actual parting from the château was not so painful to her as to its owners, but the life at Paris was far less congenial. She was too rustic ever to feel at home in a city; the stairs tried her temper, the noise tried her head, and altogether she was for a time most unhappy. Espérance only discovered a small part of her miseries, for the good old servant was far too unselfish to complain, and devoted herself more than ever to the service of the De Mabillons.

The winter was over, and the bright spring weather was pleasant enough at Paris, even to those accustomed to a country life. Espérance, as she sat with her needlework by the open window, could think of her old home almost without a sigh, so sweet and clear did the air feel, and so bright and cheerful was the sunshine. The room in which she was seated was bare of all luxuries; a polished floor, a stove, and the necessary chairs and tables, sound cold enough in description, nevertheless there was an air of freshness and grace in the arrangement of the whole, which is often wanting in better furnished rooms.

Espérance was thoroughly French, and had all a Frenchwoman's delicate tact and taste. Her mother had

been of English birth, but had apparently bequeathed little of her nationality to her child—perhaps, rather, to M. de Mabillon's disappointment; he would have been pleased to have some likeness to his fair little English wife, but both Espérance and Gaspard were unmistakably De Mabillons. Espérance was not, strictly speaking, pretty, but there was a freshness and glow about her complexion which made up for any want of actual beauty. Her low, smooth brow and regular features were not in the least striking, but the power of the face lay in her eyes, which, though not large, were wonderfully bright and of the richest brown colour, soft and velvety in the shade, and clear as amber in the light. Her dark hair fell like a cloud round her pretty, sloping shoulders, and her slight figure and little round waist might have been the envy of many a belle.

The afternoon was somewhat advanced, and Espérance, neglecting her work, stationed herself at the window to watch for her brother's return. Gaspard was now studying for the bar, notwithstanding that his father's fallen fortunes would have made some less up-hill profession far more advisable.

To be an advocate, however, had long been his wish, and M. de Mabillon, despite his poverty, would not withstand him, and even went so far as to seek work himself in order to meet their expenses.

This, however, was not to be had; he was too completely the country gentleman, and too ignorant in business matters, to meet with any suitable employment.

From her window *au quatrième*, Espérance soon descried her brother in the distance, accompanied, much to her surprise, by a stranger, long-legged and stalwart, and, on nearer view, decidedly English. Visitors were so rare in the little *salon* that Espérance was in a flutter of excite-

ment at the very idea; she listened eagerly for footsteps —yes, there were assuredly two people mounting the flight of stairs.

The door was opened by Gaspard.

'I have brought you a visitor, *chérie*. Is my father not at home?'

Then as Espérance bowed to the stranger,

'No, no, this is our cousin, Mr. George Palgrave, you must give him an English hand-shake. We met each other most unexpectedly at Galignani's, each recognising the other's name.'

Espérance looked up full of curiosity, for the English relations had always been enveloped in a cloud of mystery. She was not particularly struck with the specimen before her. George Palgrave might, perhaps, have been five-and-twenty; he was tall, large made, fair complexioned, and in Espérance's eyes, awkward looking, as complete a contrast to the slight, dark-eyed Gaspard, as could have been found.

She shook hands with him as directed, and noticing that his French was decidedly embarrassing to him, began to display her small stock of English with some pride.

'You have made a good voyage, I hope, my cousin?'

'A fairly good crossing, thank you; there was an ugly sou'wester when we started, but it soon went down.'

Espérance had not the faintest idea of the meaning of 'an ugly sou'wester,' but she went on bravely.

'And you are arrived at Paris to-day? I hope you will pass some time here!'

'I wish I could, but unfortunately I must leave this evening, I am merely passing through, on my way to Switzerland. It was most fortunate that I chanced to meet your brother, I had no idea you were living at Paris.'

'Since the last four months. Do you know, Monsieur, you are the first of our English relations that I have seen? Tell us of our cousins, we do not even know their names; is it not so, Gaspard?'

Mr. Palgrave looked amused.

'And I have not yet had the honour of hearing yours.'

'For me, I am Espérance; now please, our English cousins.'

'I am the only one of the Palgrave family; then there are the three Miss Collinsons, or rather two, for the eldest is married—Mrs. Mortlake. The others are called Cornelia and Bertha.'

'Cornelia! ah! that is not pretty. Bertha, I like; tell me about her.'

Mr. Palgrave seemed embarrassed, and was glad to be spared a description, by the entrance of M. de Mabillon.

Espérance hurried forward to meet her father.

'Papa, this is our English cousin, Mr. Palgrave; he is telling me all about our relations.'

M. de Mabillon's greeting was gravely polite, but scarcely cordial; the conversation became at once more formal and stiff, and Mr. Palgrave's complexion grew so fiery, that Espérance felt her own cheeks tingle out of sympathy. Her father was evidently well acquainted with all the mysterious relations; she heard him inquire after Dean Collinson and his daughters, after Mr. and Mrs. Palgrave, and other unknown names, but there was a curious constraint in his manner which Espérance could not account for. She grew a little weary and oppressed, and was not sorry when her cousin rose to go, having refused an invitation to dinner.

Gaspard, also a little surprised at his father's coldness, proposed to act as guide to his cousin, and the two took

their departure, leaving M. de Mabillon and Espérance alone.

M. de Mabillon sighed heavily as the door closed upon them.

'So that is George Palgrave; poor fellow, I was but half civil to him—you must not follow my bad example, dear child.'

'Papa! I do not understand. Why do you not like our cousin; and why have you never told me about our English relations before?'

'For many reasons,' said M. de Mabillon. 'We are cut off from them, both by distance and by inclination. There has never been any intercourse between us since your mother's death; I am too much disliked by them.'

'You disliked, papa! It is impossible!'

M. de Mabillon smiled.

'You had better hear the whole story, and then you will understand. When I was a young man I was travelling in England, and while spending some weeks in London, was introduced to your mother, then a Miss Collinson, sister of the Dean, whom I mentioned just now. He was then in possession of some London living, and Amy, your mother, lived with him. They were the eldest and youngest of a large family, most of whom had died, and one or two of whom were married. Amy was very beautiful, and from the first I loved her. She had other admirers, however, and among them a certain Sir Henry Worthington, a very rich and influential man. Mr. Collinson thought the connexion would be a useful one, and urged your mother to consent. At the same time I made my proposal to him for his sister's hand, greatly to his annoyance. So anxious was he for the other connexion that he absolutely refused at first to mention my name to her. His behaviour at the time is too bad to be recalled; however,

at length he was obliged to yield, in so far that I was allowed to speak to your mother myself. To Mr. Collinson's indignation, she accepted me, and as she was of age he had no power to prevent the engagement.'

'But, papa, why did Mr. Collinson dislike you?' asked Espérance, greatly puzzled.

'Partly because I was not English; partly on account of my poverty; and, I fancy, in a great measure, because I was the obstacle which had hindered the connexion with Sir Henry Worthington.'

'And what happened?' asked Espérance, eagerly.

'Mr. Collinson refused to let the marriage take place from his house, which greatly distressed your mother. His wife, however, was more kind hearted, and it was arranged that she should be married from the house of her mother, a Mrs. Passmore. Mr. Collinson would not be present at our marriage, and never saw your mother afterwards. We returned to France immediately, and there has been scarcely any communication between the two families since. George Palgrave is the first to have visited us, his mother was your mother's eldest sister.'

'And I have always wished to see them all!' exclaimed Espérance; 'but now I know I should dislike them, since they treated you so badly, papa.'

'No, no, dear, try for my sake not to continue the family feud; such quarrels should, if possible, be forgotten; and though I own that in my case the forgiveness has not been hearty, yet there is no reason for the next generation to feel so strongly.'

'But they, that is to say, Mr. Collinson, insulted you, papa.'

'Yes, that is true; I forgave that at once, but I never can forget his conduct to your mother, Espérance, it broke her heart—I know it—though she tried hard to hide it

from me. But this is only grieving you, my child; and, besides, you must not think too harshly of your uncle—he is, I believe, a good man, only he was once cruelly mistaken. We will say no more about those times; come and walk with me a little, you lose your colour shut up so much in this room.'

Espérance went to put on her walking things, full of wonder at the strange revelation which had just been made. And yet it had been her greatest wish to visit England, and see these unknown relations; nay, even now, she felt a strong curiosity with regard to the second generation, though the very name of her uncle, Dean Collinson, roused her indignation.

CHAPTER III.

'"He wills to give you battle, power for power,
So please you, on the morrow."
"On the morrow
We will join battle, then," replied Dunois,
"And God befriend the right."'

SOUTHEY'S *Joan of Arc.*

GEORGE PALGRAVE'S visit was now a thing of the past. Occasionally Espérance would recall the conversation she had had with her father, and spend a few minutes in picturing to herself her distant relations; but the sad story had ceased to trouble her—she lived almost entirely in the present.

Already the clear horizon of her childhood was broken; a little cloud had arisen, and, as time passed, it grew blacker and more threatening, for week by week M. de Mabillon's money matters grew more and more involved, and Espérance could not but share in his anxiety. Gaspard, too, was depressed and unhappy, conscious that he was an

additional expense to his father, and yet unwilling to give up his profession. Espérance, his usual confidante, was not quite so sympathising as he could have wished; it was impossible she could appreciate the sacrifice. 'How could you really care more for stupid, dull, law books, than for helping papa,' she argued day after day.

'You do not understand, *chérie*, that it would be for one's whole life,' said Gaspard, anxious that his difficulties should be fairly understood.

'*Bien!* what more could one wish than to help one's father; besides, you would like your work in time.'

'What! the drudgery of a desk—a paltry clerkship—it is impossible! however, as you say, I suppose it is one's duty.'

'And you will do it; I know you will, by your face,' exclaimed Espérance. 'Dear Gaspard! I love you more than ever; and how glad papa will be! You will be really earning money, as well as spending it; and then in time, who knows, perhaps we shall get the château back again, all through you.'

'A *Château en Espagne*, indeed!' said Gaspard, laughing, as he twisted Espérance's glossy hair between his fingers. 'You women have such notions about money matters; and yet you are full of advice as to work.'

Then, as she looked a little indignant—'No, no, you need not be offended, for after all have I not taken your advice, and consented to that abominable clerkship?'

'It is true; and you are a real hero, *mon ami*,' replied Espérance, with a fervent embrace. 'How I wish papa would come home, to hear the good news; let us watch for him,' and opening the *jalousies*, she looked eagerly down the sunny street.

Presently M. de Mabillon came into sight, walking very quickly, in spite of the heat of the July day.

'Papa must be bringing us some news!' exclaimed Espérance; 'he walks like the wind. Look, Gaspard.'

'Ah! no doubt there is something fresh about this Prussian business,' said Gaspard, coming forward quickly; 'I thought everything was quieted down again, though papa did say there was thunder in the air.'

'What about Prussia?' asked Espérance, knowing nothing of politics.

'Some fuss about Prince Leopold trying to get the Spanish throne; but they said a day or two ago he had resigned. Of course France would never have allowed it.'

Here the door was opened by M. de Mabillon, and there was an eager inquiry from both occupants of the room:

'What news, papa?'

'There is tremendous excitement,' replied M. de Mabillon, with more vehemence than Espérance had ever seen in him before. 'The whole city is in a tumult; they say that M. Benedetti has been insulted by the King of Prussia, and war has been declared.'

'War! with Prussia!' exclaimed Gaspard, in delighted excitement; while Espérance, startled and bewildered, echoed the words in a very different tone.

She listened to the eager talk between her father and brother, still scarcely taking in this strangely sudden intelligence.

'Papa, do tell me about it. Who is M. Benedetti, and why are we going to war? I don't understand.'

'M. Benedetti is our Ambassador at Berlin,' said M. de Mabillon; 'and as to the reason of the war, I have told you the pretext given; but privately I think that both nations were anxious to provoke a quarrel, and fight it out.'

'How can people ever wish for war!' sighed Espérance, in such a sad tone that her father drew her towards him, caressing her in the way she liked best.

'I hope this war, at least, will not harm you, my child! As to the innate love of war, it is such a mixture of patriotism, policy, and personal vanity, that neither you nor I will trouble about it.'

'Women never can understand,' said Gaspard, a little scornfully. 'Espérance does not seem to care for the honour of the country. Father, you will let me enlist as a volunteer, will you not?'

Espérance turned pale, and clung more closely to her father, waiting in anxiety for his answer. This seemed to bring the war much nearer home.

M. de Mabillon had been fully expecting such a proposal, yet he hesitated for a moment before replying.

'Of course, you naturally wish to go, Gaspard,' he said, at length; 'but there are many reasons against it. Our present circumstances, for instance, and many other things; besides, if the war be of long duration, there will be all the more need for volunteers to come forward later on.'

This was evidently a grievous disappointment; and Espérance, in her relief, was sympathetic.

'Poor Gaspard! He has given up two professions in one day. Never mind; perhaps after all you will be wanted later on. *Dame!* how curious it would be to see you in a uniform!'

'Not much chance, I fear, of that,' said Gaspard, a little sullenly. 'We shall be sure to beat the Germans in no time; perhaps in a month we shall have taken Berlin; who knows?'

He spoke with such confidence that Espérance looked up in surprise.

'Is it so, indeed, papa?'

'My dear little girl, I don't think it is possible to tell yet. Everyone seems very confident of success; but

it is perfectly well known that the German army is very well organised.'

'But we have the soldiers of Jena!' said Gaspard, triumphantly. 'I shall go and see what is being done.'

He went out, promising to bring back the latest tidings; but M. de Mabillon did not put much faith in this, thinking it far more probable that he would only join the crowd on the Boulevards to shout '*Vive la guerre!*' and give vent to his enthusiasm.

Espérance, still much excited, hovered about unable to settle to anything, until, seeing that her father was engrossed in his newspaper, she ran downstairs to discuss the great topic with Madame Lemercier.

The Lemerciers were the occupants of the *troisième étage*, and had already proved themselves pleasant neighbours to the De Mabillons. Monsieur was connected with the Press, and was seldom at home; but Madame, who suffered from *ennui* in his absence, was delighted to have visitors at any hour of the day, and always made Espérance specially welcome.

This evening Madame seemed even more brisk and cheery than usual. Espérance found her reading one of her husband's articles in a Republican paper, and brimming over with excitement.

'Ah! *mon enfant*,' she exclaimed, with eagerness; 'What news we have! You have heard?'

'Yes, a minute ago, papa came in to tell us, and Gaspard is almost frantic with delight.'

'Monsieur himself came in with the news,' said Madame. 'He was panting, he was breathless, he had hurried from a distance, for a moment I was afraid he was ill: "Victor!" I exclaimed, but he interrupted me, and told me with triumph that war was declared. Then, before I had breath to speak or exclaim, he was telling me

the causes, the insults, a thousand things which I could not understand, and in a minute he was away again, leaving me bewildered—astonished—excited.'

'And yet, Madame, it is very terrible,' said Espérance, with a shudder.

'It is true, my child; you think of the suffering, the death, the destruction. Ah, yes, that indeed is terrible.'

Through the open window there floated the sound of a broken chorus—'*Mourir pour la Patrie.*'

Espérance was silent till it died away in the distance; hoarse and unmusical as were the voices, there was nevertheless a strange pathos in the song, and there were tears in her eyes as she said—'Our men are brave, they do not think of themselves; but, dear Madame, I cannot love '*la patrie*' so well as papa or Gaspard.'

'Do not cry, my child! of course you cannot—they do not intend to volunteer, I trust?'

'No; Gaspard wished to do so, but papa will not let him at present; by-and-by, perhaps, he may be more wanted; but oh! I do hope not. M. Lemercier does not go?'

'No, no; he will serve his country by contributing accounts of its success to the journals. Monsieur is a true patriot, he would gladly handle the sword, but without a doubt the pen is his best weapon.'

Espérance had heard her father speak of M. Lemercier as a hot-headed enthusiast, full of Republican ideas, and rather questioned his 'true patriotism.' She kept her thoughts to herself, however, and asked if Monsieur was as confident of success as Gaspard was.

'He says there is not the smallest doubt of our success,' said Madame Lemercier with emphasis. 'Figure to yourself our brave soldiers encountering the sausage-eating Germans. Ah! the victory will be ours.'

'Papa says the Germans are very brave, and that

their army is well organised,' said Espérance, doubtfully.

'*Ma chère,*' said Madame Lemercier, excitedly, 'M. de Mabillon is wise without doubt, he is brave, he is a man of honour, but he is not sanguine. Witness your very name—feeling that he lacked the virtue he named you "Espérance."'

'Ah! poor papa,' said Espérance, 'he christened me when he was full of trouble. For this once, then, I hope he may be wrong; it would be terrible, indeed, if we did not conquer.'

'Do not mention it, my child—except, indeed, upon your knees; the very idea makes me tremble. But it is impossible—quite impossible!'

Madame Lemercier was expressing a confidence which was very generally felt. M. de Mabillon was among the very few who thought failure a possibility; and even he was a little surprised when the news of the first defeat reached Paris. Gaspard made as much of the victory at Saarbruck as was possible, and believed that the subsequent defeats were exaggerated; but as time went on it became useless to disguise the truth, that the Germans were slowly but surely advancing.

CHAPTER IV.

'Her eyes shine tearful as they glance:
"Who shall give back my slaughtered Sons?"
"Bind up," she saith, "my wounded ones."
"Alas, France!"
'A time there is for change and chance,
A time for drinking of the cup.
And One abides can yet bind up
Broken France.'

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

To Espérance each day's events seemed to make it more and more probable that Gaspard would be obliged to enlist. The evil seemed to be creeping almost imperceptibly nearer and nearer home; yet when in August preparations were made in Paris for an expected siege, she was beyond measure shocked and surprised.

M. de Mabillon was sorely perplexed, unable to make up his mind to leave Paris himself, and yet anxious that Espérance should be in safety. Espérance was not long in discovering the cause of his anxiety, it was impossible for her father to hide anything from her; but she was indignant at the very idea of being sent away.

'If it is your duty to stay, papa, it must be mine, too; and indeed! indeed! I could not live without you. To be far away from you without even the chance of letters! No, no, it is impossible!'

'But I am afraid even if you stay here, we shall see little of each other,' said M. de Mabillon, 'for I must join the National Guard, now that there is really a call for service.'

'And Gaspard also?' faltered Espérance. 'Oh, papa!'

Her tears fell fast; and M. de Mabillon, caressing her, again urged her going away.

'You and Javotte could return to Mabillon; I am sure the *curé* would take care of you, and you would like to see the old place again. Is it not so, dear?'

'Papa, indeed I cannot go. Let me stay, and I will not be any trouble; Javotte and I can make *charpie*, and tear bandages all day long, and that will be serving the country. Promise me, dear papa, that I shall be with you.'

She asked so beseechingly, that M. de Mabillon could not find it in his heart to refuse.

'Very well, my child,' he answered, 'it shall be as you wish, you shall stay here and show your patriotism; after all, it may be best to keep together, and for aught we know, Mabillon may not be safer from the enemy than Paris.'

In spite of all the troubles which she knew must be in store, Espérance felt as happy and light-hearted after this promise had been given, as in her most cloudless country days. Moreover, there was a certain excitement in the atmosphere, which could not fail to please the little French girl.

From the windows might be seen much that was novel and amusing. Gay uniforms—awkward-looking volunteers—and, above all, a perpetual stream of peasantry flocking into Paris for protection, all their worldly goods piled up on carts in wild array; beds, clocks, useless old *armoires*, sacks of potatoes, strings of onions, and not unfrequently aged parents or tired children, were all mingled promiscuously. Espérance chose to see the laughable side of the picture; her father, with more insight, saw the ruin of which this motley procession was the witness; while Gaspard, with the selfishness of a citizen, inveighed against the extra 'mouths.'

By degrees. however, such little excitements ceased to please Espérance. She spent the long monotonous days chiefly in working with Madame Lemercier, for the sick and wounded; Javotte had already begun to find her marketing a lengthy process, and was out almost all day; while M. de Mabillon and Gaspard were constantly at drill.

And so the time wore slowly on; and although there was still the eager inquiry for news each day, almost everyone was learning that the official notices could not be trusted, and that all disastrous tidings were kept back as long as possible. Gaspard, who was always hopeful, maintained that the dearth of all important news was a good sign; but M. de Mabillon was of very different opinion, and when September began, felt more certain than ever that the lull betokened a crisis.

And at length it came. Late on the evening of the 3rd of September, the terrible news of the defeat at Sedan became generally known. The surrender of MacMahon's army and of the Emperor, raised a storm of indignation at Paris; and the Republican spirit, latent for so long, seemed to burst forth like wild-fire.

The De Mabillons were Imperialists, but although, of course, they took no active part in the next day's proceedings, they were absent all day, and Espérance and Madame Lemercier were obliged to console each other as best they could, both being very eager to know what was going on.

It was a long, weary Sunday; Espérance would have liked to go out, but Madame was afraid of the crowd, and had a wholesome terror of '*les rouges*,' although they were her husband's party. Not till night did they hear all that had happened on that memorable day.

Espérance was already in bed when she heard her

father come back. Her eager call brought him at once to her side, and she asked what had kept him so long.

'I should have returned before had I not known that Madame Lemercier would be with you, dear child. "What has been done?" you ask. There has been another Revolution, though, thank God, a bloodless one; the Empress has fled, and the Republic is already proclaimed.'

'The Republic! Ah! how delighted M. Lemercier will be. But, papa, did you expect this?'

'Anything may be expected after such news as that of yesterday,' said M. de Mabillon, sadly. 'The capitulation of eighty thousand men is an unheard of thing; the Parisians would not have borne it so quietly, had there not been the excitement of setting up this Republic, to content them. But there, my little patriot, I must not keep you awake any longer—sleep, and forget these national disasters.'

But the national disasters began to thicken so soon that Espérance had not much chance of forgetting them.

In less than a fortnight two of the German armies had taken up their position before Paris, and the actual siege had begun.

Now was the time when courage was really needed, and Espérance found herself sorely taxed at each parting with her two National Guards. Yet, after a few weeks had gone by, she grew almost accustomed to it, and did her part well, by her brave and unfailing cheerfulness really refreshing the tired men.

Once only did she break down. It was early in October; a sudden change of weather was affecting everyone, and the bitter cold seemed almost unbearable, particularly as fuel was becoming very scarce. The privation and suffering were beginning to tell on Espérance, and

when one day M. de Mabillon told her of an expected *sortie*, in which his battalion would probably take part, her courage gave way, and in spite of Gaspard's indignation, she expressed the most ardent desire for a capitulation.

However, when both her father and brother returned in safety, begrimed with smoke and dust, and telling triumphantly of the hundred and fifty Prussians taken prisoners, her patriotism revived again, and her courage, too. The Revolution of the 31st of October, consequent on the fall of Metz, was an almost pleasurable excitement, since she knew her father and brother to be in safety, and not even the sounding of the '*genérale*' in the dead of the night had power to alarm her.

The weeks passed by slowly, each one bringing fresh privations—even horse-flesh was now a dearly-purchased luxury, and the price of bread rose daily. Everyone was beginning to feel that some fresh effort must be made, and Espérance was scarcely surprised, when on the evening of the 28th of November, M. de Mabillon told her that a great *sortie* was to be attempted on the following day.

'I tell you of it, *chérie*, because I know you would be vexed if I did not,' he said, 'and because you have shown us that you can bear suspense well and bravely.'

Her troubles had certainly taught her to be more self-controlled, for she only turned a shade paler as she asked falteringly, 'Do you march to-night, dear papa?'

'Yes, in an hour's time, my darling; but let us have a few words now, while we are alone. I have been talking to M. Lemercier, and he has promised me that if anything should happen to us to-morrow he will take care of you, and when the siege is over take you and Javotte to England.'

'To England, papa! but why?'

'Because, dear, I feel sure that in whatever way this war ends, some time must pass before the country is settled. You know the present state of the Government —the scenes of the 31st of October will be sure to repeat themselves, and will, I fear, lead to something worse; so, my child, if I am no longer here to take care of you, the sooner you are safely in England the better.'

Espérance shuddered.

'We need not plan, papa. I will do just as M. Lemercier tells me; only do not talk as if—as if——'

She hid her face on his shoulder, and did not try to finish the sentence.

M. de Mabillon held her closely, now and then whispering words of comfort and trust, but more generally keeping unbroken silence; until in spite of the coming struggle Espérance was soothed, and strengthened to endure.

At length Gaspard came in, flushed and eager, but remembering Espérance, he stifled his enthusiasm. The room was almost dark, save for a faint gleam from the stove, by this he could see her little white face raised.

'Gaspard,' she said, 'is it you? Is it nearly time?'

'Yes, *chérie*, he answered, bending down to kiss her; 'I want you to be our brave little *vivandière*, and find us something before we start.'

Espérance hastened to prepare some coffee, and in a few minutes the three sat down to their scanty meal, none of them sorry that the light was dim.

Ten o'clock struck. M. de Mabillon said it was time to go, and Gaspard, ever on the alert, was ready at once. 'Courage, *chérie!*' he whispered, giving his sister a farewell kiss; 'Lemercier will let you know how we get on to-morrow.'

She let him go, passively, and with trembling fingers tried to tie her father's scarf.

'My brave little girl!' he murmured; then, as the word of praise proved too much for her, and her tears could no longer be controlled, he took her in his arms.

'My precious little Espérance, God bless you!'

She clung to him in a last, long embrace, then watched him go down the stairs in silence. The door closed upon them, and she turned to sob out her grief in the arms of the faithful old Javotte.

All the night a continuous stream of National Guards marched past. Espérance took a strange pleasure in watching them, and in trying to recognise her father's battalion. In the cold, grey dawn she slept, and Javotte put her to bed, hoping that she would sleep late the next morning, so that the suspense might not seem so long.

She woke unrefreshed and weary, her heart aching as she heard the continual firing. Madame Lemercier, knowing that this would be a trying day for her, sent up an invitation to *déjeuner*, and Espérance, who was a believer in 'distraction,' was very glad to accept it.

It was a strange meal, consisting of bad bread, cheese, and coffee without milk, but so scarce had provisions become, that Espérance thought it quite luxurious. M. Lemercier, a little, dried-up man with a fierce, black moustache, made her laugh with his description of the purchase of the cheese, and Madame was so kind and cheerful, that she began to be comforted, and to look on the bright side of things, even when later they heard that serious fighting was going on, and that the ambulances were filling fast.

Espérance had spent the whole day with Madame Lemercier; it was now dusk, and she had just returned to her own room, when her quick ear detected the sound of

footsteps; it might be M. Lemercier, with fresh news. She darted to the head of the stairs. Slowly the steps drew nearer, and, straining her eyes into the darkness, she gave a little cry of joy.

'Gaspard! Gaspard! is it really you?'

'Myself, and no other, *chérie*,' replied the well-known voice; then, as she would have embraced him—'Take care, this right arm of mine is damaged.'

'You are wounded!' cried Espérance, greatly shocked.

'A mere trifle, only a flesh wound; I have just had the bullet extracted.'

'Don't speak of it; it makes me shudder,' said Espérance, lighting one of the few remaining candles, that she might feast her eyes with the sight of her wounded hero. He looked pale and exhausted, but seemed to enjoy talking about the day's events.

It seemed that nothing had been gained; the losses had been about equal on both sides, and the battle had still been raging when he left the field.

'And papa?' asked Espérance.

'Quite well when I left, and very glad that I could take back the news to you.'

'Then there is no chance of his coming home to-night?'

'Not the slightest, unless he follows my example. To-morrow we will go up to the fortifications and see how affairs are prospering.'

This was an exciting prospect, and Espérance had a great longing to be near her father; she thought in her ignorance, that it would be easier to bear the suspense, if she were within sight of the battle. Gaspard was much refreshed by a night's rest, and the brother and sister set out on their expedition eagerly and hopefully. The day was warm and bright, there was a holiday feeling in the

air, which proved irresistible to many. Espérance was startled on reaching the ramparts, to find the spectators laughing, chatting, smoking, utterly regardless of the great tragedy that was going on.

It was the first time she had seen any fighting, and even from a distance the scene was sufficiently terrible to be for ever imprinted on her memory. Gaspard explained to her the positions of the different divisions, and she tried to understand the plan of the attack, but her attention was soon drawn away to the long file of ambulances which was constantly passing into the city by one of the gates close by.

Terrible havoc was being made among the French—around the gate was a crowd of anxious relatives, watching the ambulances eagerly as they passed; now and then there was a recognition, which made Espérance shiver.

'Let us come and watch, too,' she said at length; and Gaspard consenting, they took up their position among the anxious little group.

They had waited long, and Espérance had begun to feel faint with fatigue, and from the long train of terrible sights passing before her. She closed her eyes for a minute, when a half-smothered ejaculation from Gaspard roused her—looking up she saw a litter being borne past, on it a National Guard, his uniform covered with blood. Her heart throbbed wildly, her head swam, but with a kind of desperation she forced herself to look at the face—it was indeed that of her father.

A great mist came before her eyes, she felt Gaspard put his left arm round her, and was conscious of relief. He spoke to her. She caught the words '*Ambulance Américaine*,' understood that they were to follow, and moved mechanically through the crowd.

At length they reached the *Avenue de l'Impératrice*, and applied for admittance at the ambulance; they had to wait long, however, and Espérance's tears were by this time flowing fast. A young American lady, touched by the sight, tried to comfort her.

'You are waiting for news of a friend?'

'Of my father,' sobbed she; 'oh! when will they tell us?'

'As soon as is possible, everything is done so quickly now. See, here comes a messenger.'

She went forward and received the whispered message, then turned to Gaspard.

'You must go in at once to see your father; be prepared for the worst.'

'He is mortally wounded, then?' asked Gaspard, turning pale.

'I fear so,' replied the lady.

Without a word, Gaspard took his sister by the hand, and followed the messenger into a cool, airy tent, where, notwithstanding the fresh cases which were constantly pouring in, all was orderly and well managed. They were conducted past rows of pallid sufferers, to the bed where M. de Mabillon lay. Gaspard saw at once that the end was very near, and was more overcome than Espérance. Now that the worst had come, she was tearless, her grief for the time being overpowered by the joy of seeing her father. The nurse made room for her, and she knelt by the bedside, smoothed his hair caressingly, and whispered his name. He opened his eyes, smiling faintly.

'We have come to see you, dear papa, Gaspard and I.'

'Gaspard's wound?' asked M. de Mabillon with difficulty.

'Going on nicely, papa.'

He seemed relieved, then looking again to Gaspard, spoke once more with great effort.

'Take care of Espérance, and promise me, Gaspard, to leave Paris—when you can—take her to England. Troubles will thicken here ——'

He broke off suddenly—his features convulsed with pain, his groans irrepressible. The nurse tried to persuade Espérance to go, anxious to spare her the sight of her father's terrible suffering, but nothing could induce her to leave him.

In the next lull he spoke to her.

'We must not doubt, or question, little Espérance—remember, "*Nous savons que toutes choses concourent ensemble au bien.*"' Then as the agony grew more intense—'Speak to me, Espérance—let me hear your voice.'

'I will say your favourite lines, dear papa,' she faltered, and in low, trembling tones, she repeated Victor Hugo's beautiful verse:—

> 'Vous qui pleurez, venez à ce Dieu, car il pleure;
> Vous qui souffrez, venez à lui, car il guérit,
> Vous qui tremblez, venez à lui, car il sourit;
> Vous qui passez, venez à lui, car il demeure.'

The pain gradually died out of his face, and as Gaspard and Espérance bent down to kiss him, he even smiled.

After that he noticed nothing, but lay with closed eyes, sometimes murmuring the lines Espérance had repeated, '*Venez à ce Dieu,*' and the last time adding, faintly, '*il guérit.*' A few minutes of unconsciousness elapsed, then the last faint breath was drawn, and Alphonse de Mabillon's troubled life was over.

CHAPTER V.

'Tout ce qui m'entourait me racontait ma perte:
Quand la nuit dans les airs jeta son crêpe noir.
Mon père à ses côtés ne me fit plus asseoir,
Et j'attendi en vain à sa place déserte
Une tendre caresse, et le baiser du soir.'

MILLEVOYE.

THE American lady, who had acted as nurse to M. de Mabillon, did the kindest and most sensible thing she could have done—took Espérance in her arms, and let her cry quietly. Gaspard, meanwhile, was speaking to an attendant about the funeral which was to take place early the next morning. He soon returned to her side, speaking very gently,

'Dear Espérance, we must come; we hinder Madame.'

With a strong effort, Espérance controlled herself sufficiently to murmur thanks and farewells, and allowed Gaspard to lead her away.

At the entrance they paused for a moment. It was hard, very hard, to return to the world. The sun shone brightly, the street traffic went on busily, all seemed cruelly the same, while their lives had been suddenly robbed of happiness.

Gaspard was, perhaps, the most to be pitied, for with him rested all the responsibility; already he felt that the charge of his little sister was no sinecure—already the harassing thought of their poverty began to press upon him. With this in his mind, his first question was a practical one.

'Can you walk, *chérie?* I think we ought hardly to afford a *fiacre.*'

Perhaps she thought him a little heartless; she just

inclined her head, and they walked home in perfect silence.

Meanwhile, Gaspard, tired out with the events of the two last days, and weak from hunger and loss of blood, began to grow faint. Once he stumbled and almost fell, but Espérance was too much absorbed in her grief to notice, and from very necessity he forced himself to keep up.

At length they reached home, and climbed the long flight of stairs. Javotte, hearing their approach, came to meet them, but Espérance cut short her inquiries and clung to her sobbing. As for Gaspard, he passed on quietly into the *salon* and groped his way to the sofa, just conscious of relief in the feeling that he need no longer make an effort to see through the gathering darkness—no longer struggle to keep his senses.

Javotte coming presently into the room gave a little scream.

'*Mon Dieu!* but it is impossible that we lose M. Gaspard, also!'

Espérance turned round in horror; the white, unconscious face did indeed look death-like.

She bent over him in an agony of grief.

'Ah, Javotte, I have been so selfish, I quite forgot how tired he must be, and he said not a word.'

'Wait then, child, he has only fainted, I will fetch some wine—there! see, he revives. Ah! he grows like his blessed father, who never complained.'

Espérance watched in anxious silence as by slow degrees Gaspard struggled back to life.

He would fain have resisted the returning consciousness, aware that there was a great weight upon his mind, and longing to escape it. When, at last, he was recovered, and opening his eyes saw Espérance's tear-

stained face, he remembered everything, and for the first time broke down completely.

Espérance was thankful for those tears; womanlike, she loved Gaspard far more now that he gave way to his emotion, than she had, when for her sake, he had borne up through the long walk. She crept nearer to him, and was glad to feel his arm round her, and his cold, trembling hand, pressing hers. Nothing is such a close uniter as a common grief; Gaspard and Espérance had never before been so much to each other.

Truth to tell, Gaspard had hitherto been very much self-engrossed. The early loss of his mother, and his solitary education, had strengthened the natural tendency; but privation, grief, and heavy responsibility, were doing their best to rouse him.

Espérance's new love was a further help; she had always been too much wrapped up in her father to spare many thoughts for Gaspard, but now that he no longer needed her loving care, she was able to transfer all her solicitude to her brother. All this of course did not take place at once, but it had its date from that terrible evening, when in the cold, dark, lonely *salon* they first realised their orphanhood.

Who has not felt the utter misery of waking in the morning after any great change, the sense of oppression, the dawning consciousness, the awful realisation? We learn from the very keenness of the pain to value the forgetfulness of sleep.

Espérance passed through it all, when she awoke on that dreary 1st of December. Everything reminded her of her grief; the perpetual firing was still going on, but one National Guard would never again serve his country; there was the tramp of a battalion marching down the street, but never more could she lo k from the window to

wave a farewell to her father; within the house she could hear Javotte preparing the coffee—only two cups would be needed that morning. And then with a rush of tears, Espérance for the first time asked the question which we too often allow to embitter our grief—'Why?'

Why had this sorrow come to them? Why had her father fallen, when hundreds of others had escaped? Why did God allow war at all? If she could only *see* how good was to come out of evil!

In the midst of her questionings Javotte entered, a world of love and tenderness in her wrinkled old face. Espérance, for the first time, fully realised how great a comfort the faithful old servant was.

'And my child has slept?' she inquired anxiously, her harsh voice unusually softened.

'Yes,' sighed Espérance, wearily. 'Kiss me, please, Javotte, I am very desolate.'

The old servant obeyed, murmuring soft terms of endearment over her, but Espérance suddenly started back.

'Javotte, how terribly thin you have grown! your bones feel quite sharp.'

Javotte shrugged her shoulders contentedly.

'That may be, child, but then one does not expect to grow fat in a siege.'

'But you are thinner than anyone I have yet seen, much more even than Madame Lemercier.'

'*Chut!* why, child, I am an old woman,' replied Javotte, shaking her head reprovingly; 'one cannot be always young and unwrinkled. But come! take your coffee, *chérie*, we lose our time, and I must go quickly to the market or we shall grow thin too soon.'

Espérance was satisfied for the time, and Javotte left the room, glad to end the discussion, and murmuring

under her breath, 'My little blessed one! dost think I would not rather starve than see thee suffer?'

Espérance had just finished her toilet when she heard Gaspard's step on the staircase. She hastened to meet him, surprised that he should have been out so early.

'Have you been to have your wound dressed?' she asked.

He did not answer for a minute, and then Espérance understood that he had been to their father's interment.

'You should have taken me, too,' she said, her eyes filling. 'Why did you go all alone?'

'I did think of you, but you were sleeping, and I could not bear to wake you; besides, it was a long walk to the cemetery; you shall go to-morrow, and take some *immortelles*.'

She turned away and began to heat Gaspard's coffee over a spirit lamp.

'Did you see the American lady,' she asked, presently; 'the one who was so kind?'

'Yes, I saw her for a moment, and she sent you this.' He drew out a little packet, which Espérance opened eagerly. It contained a lock of her father's hair, and her mother's wedding-ring, which he had always worn.

'How good, how kind of her to send them!' she exclaimed, tears running down her cheeks; 'I shall always love the Americans, Gaspard.'

She put on the slender ring reverently. It comforted her a little on that dark day, and through the darker days that followed.

CHAPTER VI.

'Oh, blest are they who live and die like these;
Loved with such love, and with such sorrow mourned.'
The Excursion.

THE De Mabillons met with a great deal of sympathy, notwithstanding that such losses as theirs were now every day events. The Lemerciers were kindness itself; indeed, had it not been for Madame's solicitude, Espérance would have fared badly. Gaspard's wound healed all too quickly, and by the middle of December he had rejoined his battalion, leaving Espérance to her woman's lot of anxious waiting. This, added to her grief and loneliness, would soon have proved too much for her, had not Madame Lemercier, on the very first day of Gaspard's absence, paid a visit to the *quatrième étage*, her kind little eyes sparkling with satisfaction as she felt the brilliancy of her new idea.

Espérance was sitting in a disconsolate attitude, wrapped in a shawl, and knitting as fast as her benumbed fingers would allow. Madame's bright eyes grew dim for a moment; there was something inexpressibly sad in the look of silent suffering, on such a young face. She made haste to unfold her plan.

'You feel very cold here,' she began, with a little shiver put in for effect, as in reality she was burning with excitement. 'Without doubt, the higher in the house, the colder the rooms. Let me feel your hands, child. *Dame!* but you will die of cold if you remain here much longer.'

'This is the worst day we have had,' said Espérance, 'and Javotte says there is no possibility of getting coal,

or even coke; she has gone out now to try to obtain wood, but they say it is very dear.'

'Yes, and what is worse than that, it is scarce,' said Madame, lowering her voice impressively; 'if you get it to-day, you may not be able to do so to-morrow.'

Madame Lemercier was usually so very sanguine that Espérance was quite surprised to hear such gloomy forebodings. She soon saw through the little device, however. Madame, thinking she had beaten about the bush long enough, cleared her throat, smoothed her lace mittens, and began. 'My dear Espérance, I come to make a proposal to you. Yes, lay aside your knitting, for it is a thing of importance—of importance, I repeat, for life is important even in a siege.'

Espérance thought of Gaspard, and said, 'Yes, Madame.'

'It is a change of life, then, that I come to contemplate,' continued Madame. 'Below, in our little *salon*, there burns a fire of wood, a small fire. This morning, Monsieur has said to me, "Antoinette, which do you prefer, a fire or a domestic? We cannot keep both." After a little consideration, I replied, "I prefer to have warmth." Thus, you see, dear, I am without a servant. What takes place then? I come to pay you a visit to recount my troubles. What do I find? That you have a servant, but no fire; while I have a fire, but no servant.'

Madame paused, out of breath. Espérance clapped her hands gaily.

'And you think we might unite our forces? Ah! but it is a good idea!'

'Really? You find it so? And your brother, will he approve?'

'Oh, yes, doubtless. He and M. Lemercier can talk politics all the evening. Picture to yourself how they will argue!'

After a consultation with Javotte, the arrangement was finally settled, and Espérance was so happily excited by the change of quarters that the day passed by almost quickly.

Gaspard, returning in the evening, was thankful enough to find a fire awaiting him, and though the conversation turned entirely on the proposed *sortie*, Espérance could not find it in her heart to be wholly unhappy, but resolved to enjoy the present while it was hers, and for the future to hope.

The next few days were particularly trying; the *sortie* was several times arranged, and then put off, in a way that taxed everyone's patience sorely.

On the night of the 20th, however, Gaspard really was obliged to march, and Espérance was painfully reminded of the terrible parting before the last *sortie*. The recollection, however, was not without its comfort, for was not her father beyond the reach of all pain, and weariness, and hardship? She could not help being really thankful now, even though the desolation and loneliness were so hard to bear.

Madame Lemercier devised all manner of distractions for her, a visit to the Ladies' Society for working for the sick and wounded, a walk with Monsieur, and new books to read. The news was not very cheering—severe fighting for eight hours, and little, if anything, gained. This was on the 21st.

On the evening of the next day everyone felt dull and depressed; Madame, her chair drawn close to the little fire, could not suppress a heavy sigh every now and then, though each time it escaped her she would give a little cough, hoping to deceive Espérance. Javotte—who, of course, had a share in the one fire—sat, rosary in hand, murmuring 'Aves' for M. Gaspard. Espérance, looking

very pale and anxious, was reading Dumas' *Tulipe Noire* aloud, trying hard to seem interested in the adventures of Cornélius and Rosa, while she strained her ears to catch the faintest sound from below.

Gryphus was in the very act of discovering '*la tulipe*,' Cornélius in an agony of grief, when Espérance suddenly stopped, and sprang to the door. Steps were slowly ascending the stairs, M. Lemercier's voice was heard making some uncomplimentary remark about Trochu—a hoarse voice assenting. A minute more, and Gaspard dragged himself into the dimly lighted room, almost falling into the nearest chair, while M. Lemercier hastened to reassure Espérance.

'No, no, he is not wounded, my dear Mademoiselle, only worn out with the fatigue and the cold. Some hot brandy-and-water, Antoinette, we shall soon revive him, do not fear.'

Espérance took the musket from the stiff, benumbed hands, and bent down to kiss her brother, starting back in horror to find his moustache quite frozen. He was just enough alive to be amused at her terror, and to whisper, hoarsely, that it would thaw very soon.

Madame Lemercier and Javotte began to tend him with great delight; it was their first attempt at nursing, and between their care, the warmth, and the restoratives, Gaspard was soon relieved, and able to give some account of the *sortie*, which had been unsuccessful.

This intense cold was of long duration. It told fearfully upon the National Guard, so much so, indeed, that as many as could possibly be spared, were sent back to Paris. Gaspard had taken a violent chill and was ill in bed, and Espérance, while thankful to have him safe at home, was terribly distressed at the short rations of unappetising horse-flesh, which, in his weak state he found almost un-

eatable. She, for the first time, fully realised all the discomforts of the siege, and longed impatiently for an end to their privation and misery.

Christmas was not quite so sad as she had anticipated. To begin with, Gaspard was much better, and able to come down to the Lemercier's *salon*, and Madame was so bright and cheerful, that it was impossible not to catch something of her humour.

Then, too, there was a great surprise. Javotte returned from her marketing with a beaming face; she had been standing *en queue* for hours, but what joy! she had brought home rations of beef, and a little butter, luxuries long unheard of.

Such good fortune did not come again, however. Food became more and more scarce, the thermometer still remained twelve degrees below zero, and there was no prospect of relief.

The *Jour de l'an* dawned gloomily, even Madame Lemercier felt a little depressed, everything was so *triste;* no presents, no amusements, no gaieties of any description, but a grey sky, a mourning people, and distant firing.

M. Lemercier went to a political lecture at the republican club to which he belonged, Gaspard insisted on joining his battalion, Javotte went out to the market, and Espérance and Madame were left to their own devices.

Espérance began to make a wreath of *immortelles* for her father's grave. Madame sat knitting for some time; at last she spoke—but hurriedly—and as if she disliked her subject.

'Espérance, *mon amie,* do you not think that our poor Javotte grows very thin?'

Espérance started.

'I told her so only the other day, but she merely

laughed, and said one did not expect to grow fat in a siege. Do you think she is ill, dear Madame?'

'I have thought so for long, my poor child, but do not grieve, I may be mistaken. What makes me anxious is this: for the last two days I have kept watch with great care to see what she eats, and as far as I can tell only two small pieces of bread has she taken.'

Espérance's eyes filled with tears.

'It must have been in order that Gaspard and I should have enough! My poor Javotte! how selfish I have been! but even then it seemed so little.'

While they were still talking of her, Javotte entered with her small market-basket, which, though light enough, seemed to hang heavily on her arm. She was an ugly old woman, with a very yellow, wrinkled face, made still more conspicuous by her pure white cap and scarlet neckerchief; but there was something pathetic in her little black eyes, and in her odd, harsh voice as she said, 'The rations are but small to-day, *chérie*, but they say that at the *Marché St. Germain*, there are some pretty little dogs and cats for sale.'

Espérance could not help laughing.

'Yes, yes, I told you so, Madame—"*Boucherie canine et féline.*" I have seen it with my own eyes. Doubtless that is where my poor Minette went the other day, when we missed her! But, Javotte! Javotte! what is it?' for Javotte had suddenly turned pale and would have fallen, had not Madame guided her to a chair.

'Dear child, do not fear,' faltered the old servant; 'it is only the cold—I shall be warm soon.'

Madame Lemercier made her swallow some brandy, which revived her for a few minutes, but she soon sank again into a semi-conscious state, and though Espérance chafed the wrinkled old hands, she could get no warmth into them.

Madame began to be alarmed, and M. Lemercier, coming in at that minute, was sent to fetch the doctor. They made a temporary bed close to the fire, and between them carried her to it, shocked to find what a light weight she was. Then Madame prepared some hot gruel, while Espérance sat sorrowfully watching the inanimate form, full of sad forebodings.

At length the pale lips moved, and Espérance bent down to catch the faint words.

'*Mon enfant bien-aimé*, who will go to the market for you, when I am dead? You must not go out unprotected.'

'Oh! my poor Javotte, do not speak so. You must not die, indeed you must not.'

'Well, my pretty, I should like to live, I have prayed that I may live to the end of the siege, that I might take care of you; but I think it will not be, for I feel myself very tired.'

'Dear, dear, Javotte! you have done so much for us. See, Madame brings you some gruel, I will feed you.'

Javotte seemed thoroughly roused; her black eyes turned anxiously in the direction of the gruel.

'Madame has not used the good oatmeal for me? Ah, what pity! it should have been for M. Gaspard to-night; and such a large cup. No, no, I cannot drink it.'

Even Madame Lemercier could not restrain her tears. Espérance, with a bitter cry threw herself down by the bedside.

'Oh! Javotte, Javotte! you have been starving yourself for our sake, and now it is too late!'

Before she had recovered herself, M. Lemercier returned with the doctor. But alas, there was nothing to be done, the poor old woman was evidently dying—cold, hunger, and her own self-denial, had slowly but surely done their work.

Espérance waited for the end in heart-broken silence. At Javotte's request she brought the carved, black rosary, and placed it in the withered, nerveless fingers, while with failing breath the old woman murmured a prayer; then with trembling fingers, she placed the beads round Espérance's neck.

'*Pour souvenir* of your poor Javotte,' she whispered.

Madame asked if she would not see a priest, and she assented faintly, but before he arrived the soul of the faithful old servant had passed away. Her last look had been for Espérance. The poor child, full of grief and self-reproach, had bent down to kiss the cold brow, and had whispered, 'Dear Javotte, you have given your life for us!' And Javotte had looked up with a beautiful smile, and said, '*Mon enfant bien aimé*, what would you then? I love you.'

Then the smile had died away, and she had fallen asleep like a little child.

Javotte had seemed only an ignorant old peasant woman; all felt now that she was indeed a saint.

While they were still standing round the bed, the priest entered with his salutation of peace. Madame hastened to tell him that it was all over, and related poor Javotte's story; and Espérance felt a strange thrill at her heart as she heard him reply,

'"And the king shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."'

CHAPTER VII.

'To fear is harder than to weep—
To watch, than to endure.
The hardest of all griefs to bear
Is a grief that is not sure.'

FABER.

THE horrors of the bombardment of the city were now added to all the previous misery. Smallpox and famine had been carrying off hundreds and hundreds of the inhabitants; now a fresh agent of death made its appearance.

The first few days were full of terror to Madame Lemercier and to Espérance. Numbers of shells had fallen in their immediate neighbourhood, and they dreaded leaving the house. But this alarm wore off with the novelty, and very soon they went about as unconcernedly as if no danger existed.

Poor Espérance felt Javotte's death deeply. Almost unconsciously she had leant upon the good old servant; and now that her father was dead, and Gaspard scarcely ever at home, she felt very lonely, and often in need of advice and help, which no one could give. Madame Lemercier, good and kind as she was, could not fill the vacant place; hers was a good-natured, but weak character, wholly unfit for any sort of guidance, and Espérance needed a much stronger support.

The days passed by slowly and painfully. Once only, a ray of comfort came, and for a time the sinking spirits of the Parisians were raised. News was brought from the provinces by a carrier-pigeon, that Faidherbe had driven back the enemy in the Pas de Calais; that an un-

known general at Nuits, with 10,000 men, had beaten the Prussians with 25,000; and that Garibaldi was at Dijon gathering recruits.

M. Lemercier was much elated at such an unexpected turn of fortune; and even Gaspard, who of late had been despondent, grew more cheerful, and his spirits were a better gauge than M. Lemercier's, for he was exposed to far more danger and hardship.

Three months of real experience as a National Guard of the marching battalions, had taught Gaspard more about life than his whole previous education. The discipline had been severe, the hardship great, the failure and disappointment very trying, but they had all done their work, and under their influence Gaspard was greatly changed.

Espérance soon found this out, even in the short visits he paid her, and felt that he was growing far more like their father than she had ever ventured to hope. This knowledge, however, sweet as it was, served to make their partings far more painful, and she looked forward with dread to the next *sortie*, which all knew must soon be attempted.

One last effort was to be made; if that failed, there would be no hope left for Paris. Even Espérance in her grief, was roused to a more patriotic feeling than she had hitherto shown, and this helped to make the parting, on the night of the 18th January, rather more bearable, for was not this the '*sortie du désespoir?*' There was something grand, inspiring, in the very name.

The time passed by wearily to the anxious Parisians. Espérance thought no day in the whole siege had been quite so long and oppressive. M. Lemercier, coming in about noon, reported that the movements of the troops had been much hindered by a fog, but that the battle was now

at its height, the attempt being to force the Prussian lines between Montretout and La Marche.

With this news they were obliged to content themselves for some time. It was not till dark that M. Lemercier returned; and then to Espérance's joy, he was not alone. In the dim light she could just discern the uniform of a National Guard, and with an eager exclamation she hurried forward, but suddenly checked herself, unable to conceal her disappointment, for it was not Gaspard.

M. Lemercier hastened to introduce the stranger, and Espérance, with truly French politeness, recovered herself at once.

'Pardon, Monsieur, I was expecting my brother. Do you bring us news?' turning to M. Lemercier.

'Yes, *mon amie*, news of Gaspard, but I trust not altogether bad news. Courage! Do not tremble so. M. Ambrosin, who is a comrade of your brother, tells us that he is wounded, but I hope not seriously.'

'*Mon Dieu!* when did he fall? Where did you leave him, Monsieur? Surely, surely he is not still on the field?' She looked at M. Ambrosin, her eyes full of agonised entreaty.

'I hope not, but Mademoiselle will understand that, in the midst of fighting, I can really hardly tell what happened. We had taken Montretout, for some time our men held it gallantly, but later in the day we were forced to evacuate it. In the retreat I was beside Monsieur, your brother, when a ball struck him, and he fell. I think he was only stunned, but Mademoiselle knows that there is no pause in a retreat. There were ambulances near. It is very possible that he is at this moment in the city, being carefully attended to.'

Espérance shuddered. That '*bien possible*' was posi-

tive torture to her. Was it not, also, very possible that he was still on the battle-field, lying out there in the cold, among the dead and the dying, perhaps dying himself—and alone! Her tears fell fast, as in imagination she pictured all this to herself. A movement from M. Lemercier roused her. She found M. Ambrosin taking leave, and, in spite of her swimming eyes, called up a sweet little farewell smile, and a few broken words of gratitude for his kindness.

He left the room, and Madame, with loving words and caresses, strove to comfort Espérance.

'Poor little one,' she said tenderly; 'all the troubles of life come to you. But do not cry, dear child; no doubt Gaspard is but slightly wounded. Has he not passed through the rest of the siege without hurt—save, indeed, that arm wound, which was but a trifle?'

'But the uncertainty,' sobbed poor Espérance; 'I could bear it, if I only knew all, even if he were dead.' Then as Madame could find no reply, she started up with despairing energy, 'Madame, I must know where he is! I must find him! I will go to the ambulances.'

She hurried away to her own room, snatched up her cloak and hat, and in half-a-minute was again in the *salon*, where Monsieur and Madame Lemercier were discussing the possibility of her enterprise.

Monsieur, who was a kind-hearted little man, came to meet her with a mixture of affected gallantry and true sympathy, which would have amused her at any other time.

'Dear Mademoiselle,' he began, 'do you rightly understand the difficulty of your task? The ambulances are scattered about the city in every direction; the night is cold, it will be too much for you. I will make every possible inquiry if you will permit——'

Espérance interrupted him.

'Monsieur is too good, if you will indeed go with me, I shall have no difficulty, it will be far easier for me to bear than waiting here. Let us come at once if you can really spare the time. Adieu, dear Madame, give us your good wishes.'

The night air felt cold and chill as Espérance and her companion walked down the street; the lamps had long ago ceased to be lighted, and their progress would have been but slow had not M. Lemercier known every inch of the ground. A few minutes' walking brought them to the Odéon Theatre, which had been converted into an ambulance. Espérance's heart beat high with hope as she waited in the vestibule while M. Lemercier went in to make inquiries, but after what seemed to her a long absence, he returned with 'failure' written on his face.

'He is not there, dear Mademoiselle. But courage! we will find him yet. Let us go to the American ambulance.'

Espérance loved the American hospital in spite of its painful associations; she had often visited it since her father's death, taking her small contributions of *charpie* or garments for the sick, so she was pleased at the thought of going there, and of seeing again the kind American ladies, and somehow she felt confident that Gaspard must be there if anywhere.

She walked on bravely in this hope. But alas, she was soon undeceived. The cool, airy tents were there, the prettily-dressed American ladies were just as she had pictured them, but among the rows of wounded soldiers Gaspard was not to be found.

The names of several other ambulances were suggested to them, and they went out on their search once more, but Espérance now that her hope had been disappointed, found it hard work to keep up. Bodily fatigue and mental

suffering were beginning to tell upon her, and after three or four more failures, M. Lemercier, looking at her white face, grew alarmed.

'Mademoiselle is ill. Let me call a *fiacre*, if I can procure one, indeed, which is doubtful after all the horse-flesh we have eaten. Let us return, and wait for daylight to resume our search.'

But tired as she was, Espérance would not hear of this. 'No, no, indeed I am not ill, Monsieur,' she replied quickly: 'let us do all we can. Which will be the next ambulance?'

'The Grand Hotel—and here we are; now let me persuade you to wait in the entrance while I go to inquire.'

Espérance was, by this time, so faint that she was obliged to consent, and, sinking down on a bench, she waited, though with scarcely any hope of success. It seemed hours before her companion returned, and then, once more, came the weary answer,—'It is no use—he is not there.'

M. Lemercier was now more than ever bent upon going home, and she had scarcely strength to resist his urging. It was not till he was on the very point of calling a *fiacre* that she was fully roused. The very realisation of what the relief would be, reminded her also of her object, quickening all her powers, and renewing her grief, which for the time had been half-numbed.

'Indeed, Monsieur, I would rather walk,' she exclaimed, with sufficient energy to surprise M. Lemercier; 'and we have yet to inquire at the Théâtre Français.'

'Ah, it is true,' said Monsieur, reflectively. 'You are a veritable heroine, Mademoiselle; and if you are really able to do so we will proceed. No *citoyen*,' to the driver of the *fiacre*, 'one must walk on foot during a siege. Take my advice, and eat your horse while he is yours.'

The driver growled out something about 'a fare,' and 'adding to the rations;' but they were soon out of hearing of his grumble. Espérance had been a little surprised at the friendly '*citoyen*,' bestowed by M. Lemercier on the driver. She was still unaccustomed to Republican manners, and this little incident, trifling as it was, filled her thoughts during the walk.

She was quite exhausted when they reached the Théâtre Français, and waited wearily in the vestibule, unheedful of the comers or goers—half stupified by grief, cold, and fatigue, while in her brain was a wild confusion of battle-fields, ambulances, and *citoyen* drivers. Before M. Lemercier returned she had quite lost consciousness, and in her dark corner remained unnoticed for some time.

She returned to life a little later to find M. Lemercier bending over her, a mixture of anxiety and half-suppressed excitement in his face. He gave an exclamation of relief as she opened her eyes.

'Ah, she recovers! Dear Mademoiselle, be comforted; I have good news for you. See, then, who is here!'

Espérance, thus appealed to, opened her heavy eyelids again, but only saw the statue of Voltaire. This roused her. She sat up, rubbed her eyes, and before she had time to look again, found Gaspard's arms round her, his well-known voice once more in her ears.

'Poor tired little one! And so you have been wandering all over Paris to find me!'

She could not look or speak then, but just put her head down on his shoulder and sobbed for joy, while her whole being was raised in a wordless thanksgiving.

M. Lemercier, who luckily was too true a Frenchman to dislike a 'scene,' waited patiently till she recovered herself before he proposed that they should return.

Then, for the first time, looking up, Espérance saw that Gaspard's head was bandaged, and, forgetting her own fatigue, began to make eager inquiries.

The wound was happily but a slight one, and Gaspard would have been sent home sooner, but when brought in from the field he had been, like many others, overcome by sleep, and so had been delayed. When all had been thus satisfactorily explained, M. Lemercier went to find a carriage, this time in good earnest. He, however, declined to take a seat in it himself, and sent a message by Espérance to his wife to the effect that she need not expect him to return before morning.

During the long walk he had been making all manner of observations; discontented words from passers by had caught his ear, disjointed sentences of murmuring against Trochu, and vague hopes of establishing Flourens. Full of hope for his ideal Commune, he walked off excitedly in the direction of Belleville, thankful that good fortune had favoured his search for Gaspard de Mabillon, and rejoicing that he was now free to serve '*la Patrie.*'

Espérance and Gaspard, meanwhile, had reached home safely, and were so much engrossed in each other that they scarcely heeded the *générale*, which, at eleven o'clock, resounded through the city to summon the National Guard to attack the Hotel de Ville. The insurrection, however, was but trifling; and, although for a few days M. Lemercier was very sanguine, he was soon obliged to confess that it had been unsuccessful, and that for the present the Communists must bide their time.

CHAPTER VIII.

'Kingdoms that long have stood,
And slow to strength and power attain'd at last,
Thus from the summit of high fortune's flood
Ebb to their ruin fast.'

SOUTHEY.

'IT is shameful! abominable! unbearable! We could have held out for another month, at least! We will resist; we will not allow it, such atrocious conditions—such concessions to those beggarly Prussians!'

Gaspard was panting with rage and vexation, M. Lemercier having just brought in the news that the Armistice was signed.

Madame could not help giving a sigh of relief, and Espérance might have followed her example had she not religiously tried to sympathise with Gaspard's views. She asked a safe question.

'Is it all over then?'

'Practically,' replied M. Lemercier, 'unless, indeed, we Communists can egg on the populace, which, as the Flourens insurrection failed, is more than doubtful.'

'Think how they will exult over us, the monsters! It is surely impossible that France can submit to such terms while her sons still live! We will compel Vinoy to lead us forward once more! We will show Trochu that his signature is of no avail if the children of France do not approve!'

Gaspard paused, out of breath and exhausted by his excitement; for, despite his lofty projects of future resistance and another *sortie*, his wound was by no means recovered.

M. Lemercier seized the opportunity for lamenting his pet grievance.

'And you have imprisoned the only man who has any spirit—any public feeling! If Flourens were—*bien!* what would you, Antoinette?'

'Do you not see how you are exciting our convalescent? Go, then, and find us some fresh news, and wait another week before you try to make M. Gaspard a Communist. Now tranquilise yourself, Monsieur, or your face will be permanently disfigured.'

M. Lemercier obediently left the room, and Gaspard followed his nurse's directions, though, perhaps, not for the all-sufficient reason she had given. Espérance wondered why he looked so utterly miserable; she said nothing, however, until a trifling incident solved the mystery. Someone passed the window singing the '*Marseillaise;*' the complete mockery of the words could not but strike her, and, looking up as the thoughtless passenger sang,—

'Le jour de gloire est arrivé,'

she saw that tears of grief and humiliation had escaped Gaspard. He hid his face with a bitter groan, and Espérance realised for the first time how great was his love for France.

The siege was virtually at an end; but it was not till nearly the middle of February that food became cheaper, and still the Prussians were encamped round Paris, their presence galling the humiliated people.

Every one felt that the troubles of France were by no means at an end, and M. Lemercier grew daily more hopeful for his Commune. Espérance was sorely disappointed; she had hoped for a speedy deliverance from all privation and distress; but, instead of this, the aspect of affairs grew blacker each day, and Gaspard, who, even in the worst days of the siege, had been bright and hopeful,

was now given up either to indignant murmuring or to settled melancholy.

Espérance tried obediently to grow patriotic, and succeeded in hating the Prussians very cordially, taking great pleasure in hanging a black flag from the window to greet them, when, on the 1st March, they entered to take possession of Paris. Still she could not but look forward to the time when they could leave France and find a safe, quiet refuge in England. As the weary days passed on, and M. Lemercier talked of the Commune, she longed for it more and more, and made up her mind to ask Gaspard about it the very next opportunity.

Now that his wound was healed she saw very little of him; he was out all day, and often far into the night, and for the last few days Espérance had fancied him changed—grown more hopeful, yet at the same time restless and excited.

It was now the 17th March, seven weeks from the actual capitulation. There was no longer any difficulty in leaving the city, and as Espérance sat in the lonely *salon* waiting for Gaspard's return, she could not help thinking of her father's last charge, that they should leave Paris as soon as possible. Had Gaspard forgotten, she wondered. At any rate she would remind him of it, and that very evening, too.

As if to favour her design he came in alone, and apparently in good spirits.

'So you are alone, *chérie;* it is well I returned. Where is Madame?'

'Gone to visit a friend. I am so glad you are come back, for I wanted to speak to you, Gaspard. I never seem to see you now.'

''Tis true, dear; but what can you expect in such days as these? The whole city is in agitation, the mob

is growing furious; we may expect a second Revolution any day, and this time I think we Communists shall succeed. The country must stand first, you know; it is not that I love you less.'

Espérance's heart sank. So this was Gaspard's view of the subject. Was it possible that he had really become a Communist? that his patriotism had degenerated to this?

For the first time she felt that it was impossible to agree with him, and there was a keenly pained tone in her voice as she asked,—

'Then you have adopted M. Lemercier's views? What would my father have thought of such a change?'

Gaspard looked a little surprised, then doubtful, and finally angry.

'Do not attempt to talk politics, please, Espérance; I trust no sister of mine will ever set up for a "*femme savante.*"'

Her lips grew white with pain, not so much from the actual unkindness, as from grief at the change which must have passed over Gaspard; never in her whole life had he spoken to her so bitterly.

She replied, not angrily, but unadvisedly.

'As you would; but have you forgotten your promise to our father?'

'What promise?'

'To leave France as soon as possible, and settle in England.'

'England?' Gaspard's countenance fell; he had indeed forgotten.

He was so completely taken aback, the idea was evidently so distasteful to him, that Espérance forgot their quarrel in trying to comfort him. But, alas, all she could say only made matters still worse. Gaspard received her caresses in gloomy silence, and finally rose, with an im-

patient exclamation seized his hat, and strode out of the room without a word of farewell or explanation.

It would be hard to say which was the more miserable of the two; perhaps Espérance had less cause for self-reproach, but certainly her reflections were sad enough, as hour by hour she sat watching and hoping for Gaspard's return.

She listened and waited in vain, however, for he did not come home at all that night. Espérance's words were ringing in his ears, tormenting him, haunting him, do what he would. Must he indeed leave France just at this most exciting moment? Would his father have exacted such a promise if he had foreseen all that would happen? M. Lemercier had indoctrinated him, to some extent, in his Communistic principles, and he could not fail to wish to be present during the coming struggle.

And then, to add to his difficulties, poverty began to stare him in the face. He had been too much occupied of late to spare many thoughts for money matters, but he was aware that their income was of the smallest. How could they manage the removal into another country? How could he support himself when once they were there? Was not England already swarming with exiled Frenchmen?

In the midst of his reverie he was accosted by M. Lemercier, who was walking excitedly in an opposite direction.

'De Mabillon! the very man I wanted. Our little affair is progressing most favourably; to-morrow we may expect a *fracas* that will make all Europe ring. Come, then, with me, you shall be initiated.' And linking his arm in Gaspard's, he walked off in the direction of the Faubourg St. Antoine.

But in spite of the all exciting plots and wild schemes

which were that night revealed to him, Gaspard was persistently haunted by Espérance's pale, reproachful face; and, though he listened with excited pleasure to M. Lemercier's proposals, he felt an uncomfortable twinge when he remembered how he had pained his sister.

Espérance slept little that night; she was sore at heart, and full of anxiety for Gaspard. Neither he nor M. Lemercier had returned next morning, and the day wore on slowly and gloomily. Madame, by way of 'distraction,' took Espérance to the cemetery; but the visit to her father's grave only renewed her grief, and made her long more than ever for his help and advice. She wept so passionately that Madame Lemercier was quite distressed, and began to apologise profusely for her foolish idea, her ill-conceived plan.

On the way home they heard confused reports of a Communist insurrection, but nothing definite. Madame was, of course, much interested, knowing that her husband would probably take a prominent part in any rising, and Espérance shivered as she remembered that very possibly Gaspard might be involved in it, too.

They walked home almost in silence. Madame was eager for news, however, and stayed below talking to the porter, while Espérance, taking her key, went up alone to their own rooms.

She had not waited long before footsteps were heard without. The door opened quickly and Gaspard entered, looking very pale and exhausted.

Espérance gave an astonished exclamation at his appearance, and her heart beat quickly as she wondered if he had indeed been assisting in the insurrection. But her doubts were soon dispelled; in another moment she was in his arms, while he poured out incoherent regrets, and explanations of his last night's behaviour.

She was wonderfully relieved. It was not for some minutes that she returned to the subject that had all day filled her thoughts, and asked what had been happening.

Gaspard turned away with a groan.

'Do not ask for details, it is too horrible. Lemercier told me yesterday that there would probably be a grand *fracas*. He had talked me into half believing in his ideal Commune—it sounds well enough in theory, and somehow at night it was exciting, and I, like a fool, really believed it was for the best. But when it was broad daylight, and one could see the mob looking more like demons than men, then I began to doubt. God be thanked, I had no hand in it, for it was a butchery, Espérance, nothing less —General Lecomte and Clément Thomas both murdered! Figure to yourself an old man, single-handed, against a multitude—dragged down—slaughtered! Ah! it was frightful—frightful!'

He paused, shuddering with horror, as he saw once more, in imagination, the terrible scene. It was not that he had for the first time gazed upon a horrible spectacle. For months he had been exposed to all the terrors of the siege, war and bloodshed were perfectly familiar to him, but this day every noble feeling within him had been outraged. His whole soul revolted from the barbarity of the assault, and the thought that only a few hours before he had well-nigh sided with the murderers, added to his horror.

Espérance did not allow him to think over it all much longer. She knelt down beside him, and strove, by every possible endearment, to divert his mind. He looked up, trying to smile, but something in her face upset him completely. He turned away with a quick sob.

'Faithless wretch that I have been! forgetting my promise, forgetting you, thinking only of that abominable

Commune. Espérance, we will leave Paris now, I will not let you stay here a single day longer. You are ill, I know, though you have said nothing, and my hateful neglect has been making you suffer. Ask Madame Lemercier to help you in your preparations, and I will go out now, at once, and see what can be arranged. It shall be to-morrow, at latest.'

He hurried away, leaving Espérance in a flutter of excitement, thankful, indeed, at the prospect of leaving Paris, and yet with a little mixture of regret, and a vague, undefined fear, that, after all, England might not prove all she expected.

Madame Lemercier was much distressed at Gaspard's sudden plan; she had grown very fond of Espérance, and to lose her now, at a time when she was likely to see scarcely anything of her husband, was doubly trying. She proved her love, however, by the greatest kindness, and spent half the night in helping Espérance to pack their worldly goods.

They were to start early the next morning. Gaspard had obtained passports, and had done the best he could to settle his various accounts, but everything was in such confusion, owing to the war and the siege, that his arrangements were anything but satisfactory, and he was obliged to leave much to M. Lemercier's care. He went home with the unpleasant conviction that everything was in a very bad way, and that the war had put the finishing touch to the fallen fortunes of the De Mabillons.

They were just about to start the next morning, when M. Lemercier returned, wearied with his labours, but full of triumph; he was astonished to find a *fiacre* standing at the door, and trunks being carried down stairs, but still more so, when, on reaching the *salon*, he saw that Espérance and Gaspard were in travelling attire.

'De Mabillon! I have been wondering where on earth you could be! What means this? You are not going away on this most propitious of days?'

Gaspard answered gravely.

'I cannot agree with you in thinking it propitious, our country has disgraced herself by that foul murder yesterday. Never, never, will your Commune prosper, which began with such meanness, such barbarity!'

M. Lemercier looked pained and surprised, but not ashamed.

'*Mon ami!* I grant that we had a painful scene yesterday—but it was necessary—I am convinced it was necessary. Struggle and bloodshed there must be, but at last we shall establish true liberty—true equality—and Paris will be free.'

Espérance was astonished to see how thoroughly in earnest was the speaker. His face lighted up with expectant hope, there was something noble in his aspect—and yet surely he was greatly mistaken. She wondered whether Gaspard's resolution would be shaken, and looked up anxiously, but there was no sign of change in his grave, determined face.

He dropped the subject of the Commune without further remark, and began to thank the Lemerciers for all their kindness; and then, amid tears, embraces, good wishes, and regrets, the brother and sister took leave of their home.

CHAPTER IX.

'Si le malheur te suit dans ta carrière
Arme ton cœur d'une noble fierté;
On est timide alors qu'on désespère.
Un front serein brave l'adversité.'

MDME. PERRIER.

THE journey was a sad one. Now that the parting had really come, Espérance longed to stay, and Gaspard, though his resolve was quite immovable, felt as if he were leaving his heart in Paris. Then, too, all their fellow-passengers were sad and desponding, and the murder of Clément Thomas formed the staple of conversation, which did not tend to raise Gaspard's spirits.

Every one seemed relieved when they arrived at Calais; the bustle at the station, the hurried search for luggage, and going on board the steamer, all served to divert their thoughts. It was not till they had fairly started, that Espérance realised that they had actually left France, and then a strange, dreary feeling of homelessness crept over her, and she gazed at the receding shore through a mist of tears. But in a minute or two Gaspard, glancing down, saw her trouble, put his arm round her protectingly, and whispered, 'Courage, dear! we are doing what our father wished. I do not doubt for a moment that it is best. You will try to bear it?'

And Espérance, looking up with eyes full of love and trust, said, 'I will bear anything—everything, with you' —unconsciously repeating the words with which she had answered her father when they were leaving the château.

The landing at Dover was inexpressibly dreary. It was dark, and cold, and windy. All the French passengers were in a fever of good-tempered anxiety about their luggage, and the few English passengers made matters worse by cool collectedness, and seemed persistently to stand in everyone's way.

Espérance was hurried along, she knew not whither—nor cared, so long as she had hold of Gaspard's arm—and eventually found herself safely in a railway carriage, being scanned from head to foot by sundry pairs of English eyes. She, herself, took a rapid survey of her fellow-travellers, wondered why they were so quiet, hoped that in the course of their staring they would notice Gaspard's honourable scar, and, after an animated discussion with her brother, as to the comparative merits of French and English railway accommodation, settled herself comfortably, and went to sleep, her head resting on Gaspard's shoulder.

She woke just before they reached Victoria Station, feeling dreadfully tired and hungry. The English travellers had by this time thawed a little, and two or three of the gentlemen were talking together. Espérance decided that English was certainly the harshest and most wearisome of languages.

Then came the arrival at the station, the crowded platform, the pushing and struggling towards the luggage van, finally a civil porter, a springless cab, a drive to the cheapest hotel in the neighbourhood, despairing attempts at English speaking, and a night's rest.

Espérance woke the next morning much refreshed, and ready to enjoy the sense of novelty and adventure. Fortunately, the day was fine, and their first impressions of London were favourable. The morning was an enjoyable one. They wandered about in Hyde Park, walked

along the Thames Embankment, and visited Westminster Abbey. It was not till the afternoon that Gaspard turned his thoughts to the necessary search for cheap lodgings, and began to make inquiries as to the most inexpensive quarter of London.

He was recommended to try Pentonville or Islington; and, leaving Espérance to rest at the hotel, he went out to try his fortune. It was certainly lodging hunting under difficulties, for his English was sadly deficient, and though between each failure he studied a book of dialogues in which one page was devoted to 'the hire of apartments,' he was sure to be utterly puzzled by some ill-pronounced word or unknown idiom. 'Sixpence hextra for kitchen fire,' rapidly spoken, was quite unintelligible to him, and even the different coinage was bewildering.

The afternoon was closing in, and still he had met with no suitable rooms; he began to think that Espérance would be alarmed at his long absence, and was just about to give up the search, when his eye caught an advertisement of 'Furnished Apartments,' in the window of a baker's shop. He entered without much hope of success. The shop was small but clean. A stout, good-tempered woman stood behind the counter, and perched in front of her, between the fresh loaves of bread and the scales, was a large, sleek, tabby cat, which stared at Gaspard in a patronising way with its great green eyes.

He made his 'dialogue book' inquiry, and was relieved to find that the woman spoke distinctly.

'Sitting-room and two bedrooms, sir? Yes; I think we could suit you; step this way, and see them, if you please. Come, Bismarck!'

Gaspard started; then as a spring from the counter and a loud purr followed, he laughed, and asked, 'That is your cat?'

'Yes, sir, 'tis a queer name, to be sure, but my husband is a rare politician, he is, and so he went for to call the cat Bismarck, after one of them Germans.'

'It is well-named, I observe already a likeness,' said Gaspard, smiling.

By this time they had reached the second floor, and the landlady, lighting the gas, began to do the honours of her apartment, while Bismarck stalked about in a dignified way, purring and rubbing himself against Gaspard's legs. The terms were moderate, the landlady looked honest and kind, Espérance would be delighted with the cat, and though the rooms were small and ill-furnished, they seemed to be clean; on the whole, Gaspard was pleased, and after due consideration, he decided to take them.

Espérance was delighted to hear of his success, and eager to settle in at once. The landlady had promised to have everything in readiness for them that evening, so after dinner, they drove from the hotel to their new home, Espérance in high spirits, Gaspard a little depressed. Involuntarily his thoughts had turned to the old château at Mabillon, and, perhaps, he might be forgiven for feeling a slight pang, as he watched Espérance passing in between the bread baskets, the counter, and the loaves.

She, herself, was quite unconcerned—such things did not hurt her pride; the rooms were quiet and comfortable —for the rest she did not care. She did not attempt to unpack that evening, but devoted all her energies to cheering Gaspard, until gradually his brow cleared, and under the combined influence of a fire, some well-made coffee, and Espérance's merry chatter, he began to think that, after all, life in Pentonville might be very pleasant.

The next day he lost no time in searching for work. He was not very hopeful, it is true, but he had made up his mind to do all in his power, and to leave no stone un-

turned. But day after day, he returned disappointed and weary, unable to meet with any employment.

His scanty knowledge of English was a great hindrance, and finding this out, he set to work really to study the language. Espérance, too, spent some of her long hours in the same way, and by the end of April was able, with the help of the dictionary, to read most of the English books with which the landlady could supply her. These were not of the most interesting kind, *Fox's Book of Martyrs*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Fairchild Family*, and a few dilapidated numbers of the *Youths' Magazine*, being among the most lively. Still they kept her employed, and the very quaintness of the old-fashioned sayings and doings was amusing.

But a sad time was coming, for as the weeks passed by, and still Gaspard could find no work, their small store of money was gradually melting away. Gaspard grew seriously uneasy at the prolonged silence of the Lemerciers; he was expecting a dividend to be forwarded to him, but although he had written to ask the reason of the delay, no answer had come.

At length, one morning early in May, a letter arrived in M. Lemercier's well-known flourishy handwriting. It ran as follows :—

'My Dear De Mabillon,—I regret exceedingly that you should have been inconvenienced by my tardiness in writing, but I have been so much occupied in seeking the welfare of our country, and in lending my feeble assistance to the establishment of the Commune, that I am sure you will pardon me. Regarding the dividend which you should have received ere now, it gives me much pain to tell you that the —— Company has entirely failed. Of course in this time of general agitation, it is what we

must expect. I fear this will prove a serious and deplorable loss to you at the present, but I trust I am wrong in fearing that the chief part of your capital was invested in it. Relieve me on that point as soon as possible, and think well whether it would not be best to return to France, where there is every prospect of a speedy establishment of true liberty, equality, and fraternity. Make my friendly greetings to your sister, and believe me,

'Yours, &c.,

'LEMERCIER.'

Gaspard turned pale as he read, and Espérance, seeing that something was wrong, asked anxiously,

'Is M. Lemercier in trouble? What has happened?—tell me.'

Gaspard put his arm round her protectingly as he replied, 'M. Lemercier is well himself, *chérie*, but he has written to tell me some bad news. We have lost some money, and it will leave us very poor—terribly poor.'

The troubles seemed to be never ending. Espérance did not speak, but a weary, careworn look came over her face, and Gaspard could hear a little quivering, half-stifled sigh. Somehow, that silent endurance cut him to the heart. He turned away abruptly, and leant with his elbows on the mantelpiece, fighting hard with his emotion.

Espérance reproached herself with selfishness then, and began to take her usual *rôle* of comforter.

'Darling, do not be so miserable,' she said, stroking back the overhanging hair from his forehead. 'It will not be so bad as we think, perhaps; you will hear of some work, or something will happen before long. After all, we still have each other, and besides that, we have not lost everything.'

'But it is impossible—utterly impossible—that we can

live on what is left,' said Gaspard. 'If we lived on bread and water it would not last us both for a year—and what is to come then?'

Espérance asked how much they really had left, and he named a startlingly small sum—so small that, with all her courage and hopefulness, she was for a moment half paralysed by the terrible realisation. A heavy sigh from Gaspard roused her.

'It is very bad, *chérie!*' she said, in as bright a voice as she could command; 'but we will be very economical, we will eat oatmeal, and I shall see to the *bouilli* myself, and I daresay the landlady will let us have the very old bread at a reduction. We shall fancy ourselves back in the siege!'

Gaspard smiled, and for her sake tried to speak more cheerfully; but he knew too well that not even the most rigid economy could keep them from want.

CHAPTER X.

'My poverty, but not my will, consents.'
Romeo and Juliet.

THE long days dragged wearily on, while gradually Espérance faded and drooped, till she was the mere shadow of her former self. She was not strong enough now to share in Gaspard's long wanderings, and while he was out, trying in vain to find employment of any kind, she was left alone in the dreary lodgings, to bear, as patiently as she could, the weary, aching fatigue of weakness, and the hunger which was now such a painful reality. It was hard, too, to be in the midst of plenty, and yet to want. Sometimes, when the fragrant steam rose from the

bakehouse below, the craving for food grew almost unbearable. Nor could she control herself much in her weakness, her long crying fits became more and more frequent; only, when Gaspard came in, disappointed and exhausted after his long, fruitless expedition, she always managed to be bright and cheerful.

He was grateful for her love and patience, but he could not be deceived. The long privations of the siege had tried her severely, and he felt sure that she could not bear these added hardships for any length of time. And yet when, one evening on his return, he found the room strangely quiet, and was met with no cheerful greeting, he was terribly startled. Espérance was stretched on the hard, horsehair sofa, cold and motionless, while Bismarck, with little troubled 'mews,' crept about uneasily, and tried to attract her notice.

For one awful minute, Gaspard thought she was really dead. With a great cry of despair he bent over her, touched her icy lips, and her still, nerveless hands, and listened in an agony for the faintest sign of breathing.

At last he was reassured; she began to show indications of returning consciousness, and in a few minutes was able to look up with a little smile. He would not let her talk till he had made her some coffee, and, revived by this, she volunteered her own explanation.

'I was tired, and lay down a little, and it got very dark, and cold waves came over me.'

Gaspard did not answer for a few minutes, he sat watching her sadly, while Bismarck nestled up to her, purring contentedly, and rubbing his soft head up and down under her almost shadowy hand. It was the contrast between the sleek, well-fed cat, and her worn-out, fragile form, which struck him so painfully.

He began to pace up and down the room, thinking

deeply, and evidently schooling himself to undertake something very distasteful. Espérance watched him with as much anxiety as she had strength to feel just then; his face was dark with conflicting emotions. She spoke at last.

'You are not worrying about me, Gaspard? Do not walk up and down like that, all alone; I want you to tell me what is troubling you—what you are thinking about.'

He crossed the room then, and bent down to kiss her, his resolution made.

'I am thinking, *chérie*,' he said gravely, 'that this state of things cannot go on any longer, or you will be ill.'

Espérance could not deny it, and Gaspard continued.

'I only see one thing to be done, and that is about the last thing in the world I should wish to do.'

'You do not mean to go back to Paris?' asked Espérance, anxiously.

'No, indeed! that would be useless, and besides, our father did not wish us to be there. No, Espérance, I was thinking of something far harder—we must ask our uncle, Dean Collinson, to help us.'

He paused. Espérance started up with sudden energy, her pale cheek flushing crimson.

'Ask for help—that is to say, money? A De Mabillon turn into a beggar! It is impossible you mean it, Gaspard!'

'A week or two ago, *chérie*, I should have scoffed at the very idea, as you do now; but when I see you gradually growing thinner and weaker, as you know well you have done lately—then, darling, love conquers even pride.'

Espérance was touched, but not convinced.

'To ask help of the very man who insulted our father! It is too hard! Gaspard, I would rather starve than take his money.'

'But I cannot let you starve, dear,' replied Gaspard, quietly; 'we must hope the Dean will have the delicacy not to relieve us by actual money. Perhaps he may be able to find me some employment, or he might offer to send you to school. At any rate I shall write to him.'

Espérance saw that he was quite determined, and attempted no more arguments.

She went early to bed, and then Gaspard took paper and pen, and sat down to his hard task. It was long before he was sufficiently calm to write; his whole being recoiled from such a painful humiliation. He shrank from the idea of being under an obligation to such a complete stranger. More than once he was on the point of giving it up altogether, but each time the thought of Espérance checked him—for her sake he must do it.

He found himself so much fettered by his scanty knowledge of English, that after due consideration he began another letter in his own tongue; this was much more successful, and though every stroke of the pen was a sore effort to him, he was not altogether dissatisfied with it on reading it over. Espérance should read it the next morning before he took it to the post, and if she approved it should go.

What kind of reception awaited it, he wondered.

* * * * * *

The warm summer sunshine was flooding a somewhat sombre room in the Rilchester Deanery, one morning towards the end of May. In spite of the heavily mullioned windows, and the uncompromising, crimson rep curtains, which did their best to obstruct the light, the sunbeams forced an entrance, and played exultingly round the book-lined walls, and about the silvery head of an old gentleman who was poring over an astronomical chart outspread on the table.

He was a fine-looking old man, tall and well made, and though his forehead was wrinkled with age and much study, there was a keenness in his deep-set grey eyes, which would seem to have belonged to a much younger man. He was evidently quite engrossed with his chart, for some one without knocked repeatedly at his door before he answered.

The abstracted 'Come in,' had scarcely been uttered, when the door was opened with some impatience, and a tall, commanding-looking lady entered, with a packet of letters in her hand.

'Good-morning, father. I have brought you your letters; there are not many, you will get through them before breakfast.'

The Dean looked up with a sigh.

'That terrible institution the post! it has become a curse instead of a blessing. Rowland Hill little thought what he was about when he introduced the penny postage. The former Deans of Rilchester were spared all these tiresome applications and begging-letters, and without any increase of stipend I am annoyed three times a-day. It is a great trial, Cornelia!'

Cornelia smiled sarcastically.

'Great indeed, my dear father; but to-day's burden is light, see!' and she adroitly spread the letters over the chart, while the Dean sighed once more.

'Here is one from Canon Barnwell, and one from Sir Henry Worthington, and the report of that orphanage you were inquiring about, and one in a foreign-looking hand, which might, I think, be from that French astronomer you correspond with.'

Astronomy was Dean Collinson's great hobby; his eyes kindled as he took the envelope from his daughter, and opened it eagerly.

'Can it be from M. Grignon? No, but it is in French

—what is the signature? Grignon never makes those flourishes; read me the name, Cornelia.'

'Gaspard de Mabillon,' read Cornelia, with a slight elevation of her eyebrows, but no comment.

'De Mabillon,' exclaimed the Dean, frowning. 'Amy's husband, I suppose. What on earth does he write about? Read me the letter, my dear; I never could endure a Frenchman's handwriting.'

'This must be from M. de Mabillon's son,' said Cornelia, glancing down the sheet. 'Well, you shall hear it,' and with sufficient fluency, but a bad pronunciation, she read Gaspard's letter.

The Dean seemed to be struggling with conflicting emotions; he did not speak when his daughter ceased reading.

'Well, father?' she asked inquiringly.

'They are Amy's children,' he said, as if arguing with himself, 'but then they are De Mabillons. This fellow who writes is a thorough De Mabillon, I could have told it in a moment.'

'But it is a noble letter you must allow, father; so proud, and yet so courteous, the favour spoken of so nicely, though one can see it was an effort, and then that allusion to his mother in such perfect taste!'

The Dean was decidedly influenced by his daughter's words; his brows relaxed a little as he asked, 'Then how am I to help them?'

Cornelia thought for a minute.

'Could you get the boy some situation? That is evidently what he hopes for.'

'Difficult, very, particularly at this time,' sighed the Dean. 'Possibly Sir Henry might help him to something, but I could not think of troubling him now, during the session; besides, I hate asking favours.'

'So does this poor cousin of ours, apparently,' said Cornelia, glancing again through Gaspard's letter, her rather severe face softened by pity.

'I would rather help the little girl in some way,' said the Dean; 'she will be more like her mother; this fellow, who writes, is so terribly French. Yes, decidedly, the little girl must be relieved; he speaks of her as suffering still from the effects of the siege.'

As the Dean warmed with his subject, Cornelia's interest visibly declined.

'You would not send her to school, surely?' she asked, a little impatiently.

'No, not to a school, I do not approve of a school for girls. No, we will offer her a home here. She is my own sister's child, and she shall be welcome, though, remember, Cornelia, I most strongly disapproved of your aunt Amy's marriage, most strongly.'

'And you were quite right, as events have proved,' replied Cornelia, composedly. 'Her children are bearing the penalty of her wilfulness. Shall you write to-day?'

'Yes, I suppose it must be to-day,' sighed the Dean. 'These letters cost me a great deal of trouble, and waste my time sadly; but I suppose it had better be written to-day. You will tell Christabel and Bertha, but save me any further discussion upon the subject.'

Cornelia promised that his wishes should be attended to, and left the room; whereupon the Dean hastily re-adjusted his spectacles, tossed aside the unwelcome letters, and was soon deeply engrossed in his astronomical labours.

Cornelia did not judge it prudent to tell her sisters of the proposed change in their family till the letter was written and posted. She was not quite sure how they would take their father's most unpremeditated plan. She herself was not wholly pleased with it, but she would

have scorned any attempt to turn him from his purpose, and, with her usual stern sense of duty, resolved to make the best of it to Christabel and Bertha.

Christable Mortlake, the Dean's second daughter, had returned to her father's house as a widow some years before. She was, in some senses, the head of the house, and all the actual housekeeping fell to her share; but Cornelia, who was both clever and strong minded, was the real ruler, and was fully conscious of her power. Bertha was many years younger—a silent, apathetic girl—differing in every way from her elder sisters.

As Cornelia had expected, her surprising announcement was not very well received.

Bertha, indeed, made little comment on it, simply looking 'bored,' but Mrs. Mortlake was not so easily satisfied.

'A child to live in the house, a French girl, too! What can my father be thinking of? It will be insufferable. She will teach my poor little Bella to tell lies; you know how untruthful French people are!'

'I think Bella has learnt that accomplishment already,' said Cornelia, who was by no means blind to her niece's failings. 'Besides, as to that, our cousin is no mere child, and will not be much thrown with Bella. She is sixteen, I believe.'

'What is her name?' asked Bertha, without looking up from her book.

'Her brother speaks of her as "Espérance,"' said Cornelia; 'but I should think, very probably, she may have some second name—Amy, very likely, after her mother—and then we can call her by that.'

'And, pray, what room is she to have? You know we cannot do without any of the guest chambers.'

Cornelia was posed by this practical difficulty; she stood for a moment in thought.

'We must fit up the large attic over the nursery; there is no other room available, I see, unless we could spare the bachelor's room?'

'No, indeed,' said Mrs. Mortlake, decidedly; 'it is constantly needed. The house is sure to be full in the autumn, and I mean to ask young Magnay, the artist, to spend a week here; I must have Bella's portrait done before she loses her first teeth.'

Cornelia smiled sarcastically.

'Very well; then we must see about the attic. I think that is more in your line than in mine; perhaps you would give the necessary directions.' And, taking up a Hebrew Bible, a manuscript book, and a reed, Cornelia left the room.

Mrs. Mortlake began to braid a tea-cozy for a bazaar (she called it 'charity work'), while inwardly she was thinking very uncharitably of the De Mabillons, and murmuring that it really was very unfair that an old man like her father should take such a strange whim into his head, and injure the prospects of his grandchild, by unnecessary kindness to unknown relations.

CHAPTER XI.

'Je ne vous aime pas Hylas,
Je n'en saurais dire la cause,
Je sais seulement une chose,
C'est que je ne nous aime pas.'

BUSSY, *Comte de Rabutin.*

ESPÉRANCE and Gaspard waited hopefully for the Dean's reply, trying to persuade themselves that, now the favour had been asked, the worst was over, and that their pride would be spared further pain.

They were cruelly disappointed in their hopes.

The letter bearing the Rilchester post-mark came early the next morning. Gaspard tore open the envelope eagerly; Espérance bent over his shoulder, exclaiming at the crabbed, illegible handwriting. They deciphered it slowly and with difficulty.

The opening sentiments were not unkind, the first page being almost entirely occupied with references to the siege of Paris and comments on the present state of France; but then, unluckily, came a sentence which made the olive cheeks of the two refugees flush crimson.

'It is not for me to judge how far your present poverty arises from the disturbed state of your country, or from negligence on the part of M. de Mabillon—from whichever cause it arises, I feel bound, as your mother's brother, to give you assistance——'

'Gaspard, stop! do not read any more; it is too cruel! How dare he speak so of papa!'

Gaspard drew a deep breath, but refused to put down the letter.

'No, *chérie*, we will go to the end; for your sake I must have help, at whatever cost.'

They read on:—

'With regard to employment for yourself, I am afraid I cannot be of service to you, my influence, apart from the clerical world, being but small. As you put it very rightly in your letter, your sister is, doubtless, the first consideration. I regret to hear that her health has suffered from the privations of the siege, and trust that the plan I am about to offer for your approval will soon be the means of restoring her. I shall have much pleasure in receiving your sister as an inmate of our home. She will there have all the advantages of the companionship of her cousins, and of the best society of Rilchester and the neighbourhood, and will, I hope, find the change both

beneficial and congenial. Being thus relieved from what must, I feel convinced, be a heavy responsibility to you, you will be better able to support yourself, and more free to undertake whatever suitable employment you may meet with.

'Awaiting your reply, I beg to remain,

'Yours faithfully,

'E. J. COLLINSON.

'*The Deanery, Rilchester, 29th May,* 1871.'

Espérance's brain grew dizzy as she read. She could not cry—she could not exclaim vehemently. Only one low ejaculation of utter despair escaped her: 'It is impossible! Impossible!'

Gaspard did not attempt to speak, but he drew her closer to him.

A hundred thoughts were flashing through her mind:—This home at Rilchester—could she accept it? Would it really be such a relief to Gaspard? Could she possibly bear such a dreadful humiliation? She had almost made up her mind to it when, with a sudden revulsion, came the remembrance of the Dean's slighting mention of her father. Then wounded love and pride could no longer keep silence.

'Gaspard darling, I cannot bear it! To go to his house, to live with him, when he has insulted papa, and still insults his memory! No, no! it is quite impossible—quite!'

She was sobbing now—writhing in that intense, mental pain, of which only the most sensitively-organized minds are capable. It was well she could not see Gaspard's face—the struggle between pride and selfish love, against humility and true love, was fearfully apparent. He knew that Espérance trusted implicitly in him, that whatever

decision he made she would bow to it; and yet the very consciousness of this power was a check. His heart cried out passionately to keep her near him—to lose all, to suffer all rather than be separated. His pride urged him to refuse the proffered help, to struggle on alone. But against these voices there arose another. Gaspard, in his misery, had prayed for guidance, and the guidance was given. His eye fell on the carved wooden cross hanging from Espérance's neck—poor Javotte's *souvenir*. His face changed. When at length he spoke his voice was firm and gentle.

'*Chérie*, I feel sure it is right for you to go—that even the separation will be for our good in some way we cannot yet see. Think of what our father said just before he died.'

'"All things work together for good,"' repeated Espérance between her sobs. 'I will try to believe it, Gaspard, indeed! But if only it were nearly over, if even this were the last! I am so tired of pain, and more seems always coming.'

'Poor little one!' said Gaspard, caressingly, hardly knowing how to answer her. 'Perhaps things will grow brighter after this. We must hope still, for indeed we can echo Lamartine's sentiments, "*Il ne nous reste que L'Espérance et L'Amitié.*"'

They were interrupted by Bismarck, who apparently felt himself neglected, and sprang on to Espérance's shoulder with a remonstrating 'mew.' She could not help smiling through her tears, and thus the discussion of the Dean's letter ended.

Later in the day Gaspard wrote to accept the offer of a home for Espérance, and to ask the Dean to fix the time of her coming.

In reply to this Espérance received a letter from

Cornelia, naming a day in the following week for her arrival. The letter in itself was certainly not unkind, and yet Espérance was thoroughly chilled by it. She showed it to Gaspard.

'I did think they would have asked you to take me there; but there is not a single word about you.'

Gaspard read on in silence, trying to see the good points of the letter, but evidently much puzzled.

'It is certainly a little cold,' he owned, returning it to Espérance; 'but still she has evidently thought of you, and made arrangements. She speaks of meeting you, too, at the station, which is kind.'

'I shall not like her,' said Espérance, decidedly. 'She must be as cold as ice, and as hard as a stone. You try to make the best of it, *mon ami;* but confess, now, that you agree with me.'

'Of course I should have been much happier if they had asked me to take you to Rilchester, and if there had been a little more warmth in the letter; but I think you are wrong to judge so much from this. The English are naturally more cautious and reserved than we are. Perhaps she waits to love you till she knows you.'

'Then she will never love me, and I shall never love her,' said Espérance, passionately. 'To be watched and scrutinised, and to have one's merits and failings weighed —how unbearable it will be!'

'Nonsense, *chérie;* they will love you, they cannot help it; only it is but fair that you should go prepared to love them.'

Espérance agreed to this in theory. She was not quite sure how it would be in practice.

The week passed very quickly, and all too soon the dreaded day arrived. To the very last Espérance hoped that something would occur to prevent it. Gaspard would

hear of some work, M. Lemercier would forward an unexpected dividend, or something would happen at Rilchester—the Dean might be ill, or the house burnt down!

But nothing did happen. In a few hours she was walking with Gaspard to the station, feeling like one in a horrible dream, while, in advance, the baker's boy was wheeling her boxes on a truck. Perhaps he would turn them over, and so miss the train and delay her departure. But no! nothing would go out of its course. They arrived in good time, the ticket was taken, the luggage labelled. Gaspard chose a carriage for her, and put her in charge of a middle-aged lady; and then came the parting.

The English lady was quite startled by such demonstration in a public place, but Espérance did not heed her. Just as the train was going off Gaspard found voice to say,—

'Courage, *chérie!* it will not be for ever. Promise me to hope always, however dark things look.'

And Espérance promised, trying bravely to check her fast-falling tears.

The whistle shrieked, the train moved slowly off. A faltering '*Au revoir*' passed between brother and sister, and Espérance was borne swiftly away to the North.

CHAPTER XII.

'He fixed thee mid this dance
Of plastic circumstance.
This present, thou forsooth wouldst fain arrest:

Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its bent,
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed!'

R. BROWNING.

THERE can be few people who have not at some time in their life felt the utter misery of loneliness. That day Espérance experienced it in all its fulness for the first time. True, she had often been lonely and unhappy during the siege, but that had been but a passing trouble, relieved by Gaspard's return in a few hours; this, in its uncertainty, seemed never ending. Then, too, she was so accustomed to be petted and cared for, that the very feeling of self-dependence which would have pleased some natures was misery to her; she was like an ivy plant torn down from its strong support, and left trailing on the cold earth.

It was long before she could rouse herself from her grief; a dim sense of the duty of self-management helped her, however, after a time, and she sat up with an effort and looked out of the window. The landscape was flat, and not very attractive; a succession of dull-looking fields, all wonderfully alike, bounded the line, while the hedgerows, relieved here and there by a solitary tree, looked formal and uninteresting. Instinctively she raised her eyes—fleecy white clouds were floating in a sky of the deepest blue, and as she gazed up into the bright depths comfort came to her heavy heart. She remembered that

the same sky was above both London and Rilchester, and felt less lonely.

One great trouble was spared Espérance—she was not in the least shy; the *mauvaise honte*, which would have tormented an English girl in her position, never occurred to her, and if her heart beat rather quicker than usual when the train arrived at Rilchester, and she looked to see if her cousin were on the platform, it was simply from excitement.

A tall and rather ungainly lady, with classical features and small, short-sighted looking eyes, was scanning the windows of the carriages; Espérance felt instinctively that this must be Cornelia, and with a French girl's ready observation took in every detail of her person and attire at a glance: dress, alpaca, and very much creased; jacket, meant to be fitting, but too loose in the back, and badly cut about the neck; hat, very unbecoming; face, clever-looking, though sarcastic.

By this time the train had stopped, and Espérance, who had been carried some way past the tall lady, sprang from the carriage, and pushed her way back through the crowd, revolving in her mind the most polite greeting which her English would allow.

'My cousin? I believe I am not mistaken——' she began.

Cornelia turned instantly.

'Oh, here you are, I was afraid you had not come! I hope you have had a pleasant journey?'

Espérance took the proffered hand, and responded to the formal 'How do you do?' contrasting them with the warmth of the most ordinary meeting in France.

Cornelia was evidently determined to lose no time; she made prompt inquiries after the luggage, made Espérance identify it, and then led the way to the car-

riage. They drove off in silence, Espérance waiting for her cousin to begin the conversation, Cornelia contemplating the little French girl, and wondering what her father would say to her very foreign appearance.

An eager exclamation from Espérance broke the ice.

'The cathedral! ah, but it is beautiful! it is magnificent! What height—what massiveness! I never dreamt that it was so exquisite!'

She had unconsciously relapsed into French. Cornelia was surprised and amused at the sudden rhapsody.

'It is very beautiful, is it not?' she replied, with much more warmth in her tone. 'I am glad you appreciate such things, for Rilchester is full of architectural beauties.'

'And is my uncle's house near to the cathedral?'

'Not so near as many other houses. The Close is occupied chiefly by the Canons. See, we are entering it now; beyond this is the Vicar's Court, and we pass through that to the Deanery.'

Espérance glanced curiously at the grey old houses, but deciding that they were *triste*, she turned again to the cathedral, feasting her eyes on its beauty. The grey walls of the Vicar's Court soon hid it, however, and Espérance, as they drew near their destination, began to picture in her mind the kind of welcome which awaited her. Her cousins would probably be all waiting in the hall, they would hasten forward to embrace her, the Dean would bid her welcome, and compliment her on her good looks. This had always been her experience when her father took her to visit the families of his friends in Auvergne.

Her heart beat high with expectant hope when the carriage stopped, her preconceived dislike to the Dean only adding a zest to her excitement. The footman rang the bell, two solemn strokes of the clapper resulting,

which echoed long in the quiet court. Espérance gave a slight shiver, it sounded so like a death-knell.

The door was opened, and Cornelia led the way up the steps and into a large, square hall, dimly lighted from above. Espérance looked in vain for the Dean, and for her cousins—they where nowhere to be seen.

'Where is Bertha?' she asked of her conductor; 'I am longing to see her.'

'Bertha!' said Cornelia, a little surprised at Espérance's question; 'I don't know, I am sure, perhaps we shall find her in the drawing-room. You will have some tea, will you not, before you take off your things?'

Tea at such an hour seemed strange enough to Espérance; however, she assented, and was taken to a large, well-proportioned room, which might have been very handsome had it not been overcrowded with solid furniture. She threaded her way between the tables, and chairs, and ottomans, feeling quite oppressed by the all-prevailing purple—carpet, curtains, furniture, even the wall-paper, were all in a shade of the same colour. In the deep window-seat, at the further end of the room, sat Mrs. Mortlake and Bertha. They both rose as Cornelia and Espérance approached.

'So the traveller has arrived,' said Christabel, coming forward and kissing Espérance on one cheek; 'I hope you have had a pleasant journey, dear?'

Espérance's heart was warmed by the term of endearment; she answered the question in the affirmative, unconsciously telling a story; then she turned eagerly to Bertha, the cousin from whom she hoped great things. She was much disappointed, though the cold, unmeaning kiss prepared her in some degree. She looked up anxiously—Bertha was pretty, fair-complexioned, and blue-eyed, but her whole aspect was listless and un-

interested. The glances of the two cousins met for an instant—Bertha's indifferent, dreamy, blue eyes, and Espérance's eager, flashing, brown ones, looked full at each other, then, as if by mutual consent, they both turned away without further remark.

Mrs. Mortlake made Espérance sit down, and poured her out a cup of dreadfully strong tea, which reminded her forcibly of some of Javotte's *tisanes*, and while she was still trying to drink it without betraying her disgust, the door opened and the dreaded Dean entered. He was really a beautiful old man, and Espérance could not find it in her heart to dislike him; at the same time she was, for once, a little embarrassed—it seemed so strange to meet him thus, to have entered his house, as it were, by stealth, to be actually drinking his most objectionable tea before he had bade her welcome. She went to meet him half timidly; Cornelia, noticing this, rose too.

'Father, our cousin has arrived;' then aside to Espérance, 'speak loud, he is a little deaf.'

'Welcome, my dear,' said the Dean, kissing her on her forehead. 'You have had an agreeable journey, I hope.'

'Yes, thank you, uncle,' said poor Espérance, fibbing for the third time; would these dreadful people never ask her anything else, she wondered.

'You are welcome, my dear,' repeated the Dean, still holding her hand in his, and shaking it gently, 'welcome for your mother's sake. I loved your mother dearly, though she acted against my wishes once, but I loved her in spite of that.'

'I should hope so,' thought Espérance, colouring, and trying to disengage her hand; but her uncle still held it.

'Let me look at you, my dear,' he said, drawing her to the window and scanning her features, while Espérance took the opportunity to study his face.

'Ah! I had hoped you would be like poor Amy, but there is no resemblance—too foreign, too foreign!' And the Dean sighed deeply. 'The image of her father—a regular De Mabillon—so terribly French!'

Poor Espérance flushed angrily; this last sentence was doubtless intended as a soliloquy, but it could not fail to hurt her. She had not recovered herself when the Dean, relapsing into his ordinary tone, said, 'And so your father was killed in the siege of Paris?'

He did not mean it unkindly, but he was a self-engrossed man, and often quite unintentionally inflicted pain on others; the remark was too sudden and unexpected, however. Espérance could not bear to speak of her father after that unlucky sentence, 'terribly French.' The reference to his death had brought back all her sad recollections of the 30th November, and such yearning for his presence that, do what she would, she could not restrain her tears. She faltered out something inarticulate, and then turned appealingly to Cornelia.

'You would like to come to your room, would you not? I will show you the way.'

Espérance gladly followed, making no secret of her tears as her cousin led her through the hall once more, and up a dark oak staircase.

All the sympathy which Cornelia showed was in the remark, 'Do not mind. I don't suppose my father noticed you were crying,' which, however much it might have comforted an English girl, was not the slightest consolation to Espérance.

She took her to her room, and left her with injunctions to be ready for dinner in an hour; and Espérance threw herself upon the bed, calling despairingly to her father, and crying till she could cry no longer.

When she was thoroughly exhausted, she dried her

eyes, and though by no means comforted, put her grief aside, and began to survey her new room. It was large and bare, with curious old beams supporting the ceiling, which was so low that she felt quite oppressed by its nearness; an ugly Kidderminster carpet also offended her eyes, and she would greatly have preferred the uneven, red, brick floor of her room at Mabillon to the hideous combination of red, white, and yellow which Mrs. Mortlake had selected.

Wearied with her short view of her commonplace surroundings, she rose and went to the window, hungering for something fresh or beautiful. Once more an eager exclamation escaped her as she gazed again on the grand old cathedral; each buttress and canopied niche, each beautifully-proportioned window, was a new delight, while greater distance only lent fresh beauty to the glorious tower.

The chiming of the clock recalled her to her present misery. It was certainly time to dress for dinner. She hated the thought of encountering again her most disappointing relations, and now that the first excitement of her arrival was over, began to feel very tired and ill, quite unequal to the effort of English speaking.

For the dinner she was unprepared, and therefore dreaded nothing; but her heart sank when, the gong having sounded, and the solemn procession from drawing-room to dining-room taken place, she found herself in a hot, gas-lit room, with all the windows curtained, and the beautiful sunset light shut out.

Mrs. Mortlake explained that her father disliked dining by daylight; and Espérance, though she could scarcely breathe, tried to endure it.

She was so unaccustomed to formal meals, and had for the last year lived in such extreme frugality, that the long,

substantial dinner was a real penance to her. Conversation did not flow, and had it not been for the slight amusement which she managed to derive from the awkward waiting of the footman, and from the many peculiarities of her cousins, she would have been both dull and unhappy. As it was she managed to strangle her yawns till at last the ordeal was over, and the ladies returned to the purer atmosphere of the drawing-room.

Bertha at once took up a book and retired behind it for the evening. Mrs. Mortlake and Cornelia devoted themselves to a complete examination of Espérance. Their questions were not a little embarrassing, and Mrs. Mortlake's in particular were framed in such an uncomfortable way, that in spite of Espérance's readiness to talk, she found it almost impossible to edge in a word.

For at least half-an-hour such a catechism as the following was carried on:—

'And your brother's name is——?'

'He is called Gaspard, my——'

'How old is he?'

'He is just twenty-two.'

'And you are——?'

'I am sixteen, this——.'

'Then you came to London in——?'

'In March.'

'And the siege of Paris was over on——?'

'On the 29th January, my cousin.'

By the time Mrs. Mortlake had exhausted her material for questions, Espérance was thoroughly exasperated, and her preference for Christabel was quickly put to flight. She turned with a feeling of relief to Cornelia, but her first question, though leaving ample scope for a prolonged answer, was quite as embarrassing in its way.

'How has your education been carried on?'

Espérance was puzzled, indeed, to answer this.

'Since the war I have done scarcely anything,' she faltered, by no means reassured by Cornelia's evident surprise. 'It was impossible, indeed, to study at such a time.'

'"Where there's a will there's a way,"' said Cornelia, drily. 'It was a most fatal mistake to allow you to be idle at that age, no amount of after work can compensate for that lost year. Who was your teacher?'

'My father taught me everything,' replied Espérance, casting down her eyes to hide the starting tears, 'except that when we were at Mabillon I went to the convent every afternoon for lessons in music and needlework.'

'And you have really done nothing since the war?' asked Cornelia, in such a horrified tone that Espérance could not help smiling to herself, though at the same time she racked her brains for an answer.

'Gaspard and I used to study when we came to London,' she said, at last. 'I read several English books.'

'That was very wise, I am glad to hear that. What class of book?'

'I began with *Fox's Book of Martyrs*,' said Espérance, innocently; 'it was very good, but a little *triste*, and then I read *The Fairchild Family*, which I found very amusing.'

'You could hardly have selected two more useless books. Could you not see at the time how narrow and antiquated they were?' said Cornelia, with contempt.

Poor Espérance was sadly disconcerted. She had counted a good deal on this English reading, and it was hard to have waded through two long volumes, and then to find that she had only wasted her time. Moreover, to add to her discomfort, she had not the least idea what the words 'narrow' and 'antiquated' meant. She framed a reply, however, dexterously.

'They were the only books I could obtain, and I am afraid I was too ignorant to see their—faults. I hope you will be so kind as to advise me now, and then I shall make no more mistakes.'

Cornelia promised her assistance in everything connected with literature, but there was no graciousness in her manner, and Espérance's warm thanks seemed almost to annoy her.

It was a relief when the Dean returned, for it put a stop to the long string of questions, and though his advent was quickly followed by a second edition of strong tea, Espérance endured it with equanimity, so thankful was she for any interruption. An evening of desultory conversation followed, and at ten the household assembled for family prayers, and then dispersed for the night.

Espérance was not sorry to find herself in her own room, though its loneliness was more than ever noticeable, and its vastness decidedly unpleasant. She walked round it with some misgivings, making her candle shine into all the dark corners. No ghosts were found, but as she set down the candle on the central table, her eye caught the shadow, apparently, of a large head on the opposite wall. She was startled, but the next minute discovered that it was only caused by a large glass of wall-flowers, which someone had placed on her table since dinner. This was a piece of real kindness—the first gleam of comfort she had had since her arrival. True, her adoption in itself was a kindness, but the coldness of her cousins in a great measure spoilt it, and though she was, to a certain extent, grateful for her maintenance, it was with a gratitude altogether different to that which she felt for the unexpected gift of flowers.

She was just about to put out her light, when there

came a knock at her door, and a middle-aged servant entered to ask if she could be of any use.

Espérance rightly conjectured that this must be the nurse, and fancying some likeness to poor Javotte in her manner felt greatly drawn to her.

'I have finished unpacking my box, thank you,' she replied. 'Can you tell me who brought me these beautiful *giroflées jaunes?*'

'The wall-flowers, miss? I am glad you like them. I thought they would be kind of company for you.'

'How good of you to bring them! yes, indeed, I like them so much, they remind me of our old garden in France, they grew so beautifully on the ruins.'

'Indeed, miss, I didn't know such things grew in foreign parts. However, I hope that will make you feel more at home like. Shall I take your candle, miss?'

'Yes, please,' said Espérance, laying down her head on the pillow—then, as a sudden rush of home-sickness seized her, 'And please kiss me, nurse, for I am so lonely, and you remind me of our dear old Javotte.'

The nurse kissed her respectfully, arranged the bed-clothes with a gentle hand, and left the room; and Espérance, though she cried herself to sleep, was comforted to know that she had at least one friend in the Deanery.

CHAPTER XIII.

'From each carved nook and fretted bend
Cornice and gallery seem to send
Tones that with seraph hymns might blend.

Within these walls each fluttering guest
Is gently lur'd to one safe nest—
Without, 'tis moaning and unrest.

KEBLE.

MRS. MORTLAKE lingered for some time in her sister's room, discussing the events of the day, and arranging for the morrow.

'And what do you think of Espérance?' she asked at length, more to continue the conversation than because she cared to know Cornelia's opinion.

'It is too soon for me to say, yet,' replied Cornelia, gravely.

'Ah! you are always so cautious!' said Mrs. Mortlake, laughingly. 'Now, though I do not pretend to have half your penetration, and have not a single theory to go by, yet I flatter myself I can read that character already.'

'Well?' asked Cornelia, a little scornfully.

'To begin with, then, she is as proud as Lucifer, and has evidently been made a great deal of; who ever saw an English girl of sixteen so easy and self-possessed, why she might have been twenty!'

'And that is all you have discovered about her? Well, I certainly have not done much more myself, excepting that I noticed her hands were psychical, which is a sign of an imaginative mind. Fortunately our father seems pleased with her.'

'You think so?' said Mrs. Mortlake, doubtingly. 'I

cannot say I agree with you, he was so evidently disappointed with her appearance when he first saw her.'

'First impressions go for very little,' said Cornelia, 'it will be serious, indeed, if my father does not take to her, since we have her now "for better, for worse."'

'She is French to a degree,' said Mrs. Mortlake, 'and not even pretty, did you think so?'

'Really I am the last person to give an opinion on such points, Christabel. As far as I saw, I should say that Espérance's features were good, but that at present she is much too thin and ill to be pretty. But do let us dismiss the subject—good-night.'

'Good-night,' replied Mrs. Mortlake, taking up her candle to go; 'but most assuredly she is not pretty.'

Cornelia's grave lips relaxed into a smile, as the door closed upon her sister.

'So that is it! jealousy for poor little Bella is already beginning! Oh, Christabel, how little changed you are from the days when a ball was no pleasure if you were not the *belle* of the night—when you preferred being queen of the dullest party at Rilchester, to being second elsewhere. Luckily, however, there are so many years between Espérance and Bella, that their interests are not likely to clash, but I foresee that Christabel will make that child's life a burden to her. What an account she gave of her education! it is absolutely dreadful! I must really devote some of my time to her, though I can ill afford it.'

And with a sense of fresh work to be fitted into the day, Cornelia roused herself from her reverie, lighted her reading lamp, and opening a ponderous volume was soon lost to the world around her.

Espérance came downstairs the next morning in good spirits, and ready to look at everything in the best light. Before leaving her room she had fastened one of the wall

flowers in her dress, and had caught herself singing the refrain of a game, which she used to play with the convent pupils.

'Que tu as de belles filles
Giroflée girofla!'

Her sprightliness, however, soon vanished, for in the hot, oppressive dining-room, she found to her dismay that a substantial meal awaited her. To sit down at eight o'clock to a regular *déjeûner à la fourchette*, was an almost unbearable infliction to her; she resolved to take only her customary cup of coffee and roll, but found the coffee so execrable, that it was an impossibility; moreover, Mrs. Mortlake was so evidently offended at her numerous refusals, that she forced herself to take what she would much rather have been without.

The garden looked temptingly cool and shady, and after breakfast was over Espérance asked leave to go out. Cornelia received her proposal with some surprise.

'Oh, certainly, if you wish to do so, but there is nothing worth seeing in our garden, and besides, it is almost time for service.'

'Service at the Cathedral? I am so longing to see the interior.'

'You will have plenty of opportunities then, for we always attend both morning and evening service; be careful to be ready five minutes before the hour, as my father is very particular as to punctuality.'

And Cornelia moved away, leaving Espérance chilled and repulsed, though she could not have explained why.

She was still looking out of the window, rather sadly, when Mrs. Mortlake returned, leading by the hand a fair-haired little girl of about six years of age, who would have been exceedingly pretty, had not her mouth been spoilt by constant pouting.

'Run and kiss your new cousin, Bella,' said Mrs. Mortlake. 'Go at once, there's a good child.'

But Bella drew back with an obstinate, 'Sha'n't!'

Espérance, who was very fond of children, began to coax her, and would soon have won her over, but Mrs. Mortlake interfered in an aggrieved tone.

'Excuse me, Espérance, but I must really have the management of my own child. Leave her to me.'

Then as Espérance moved to the other side of the room, with heightened colour, she turned again to the child. 'Now, Bella, do as mamma tells you and you shall have —a piece of sugar.'

Espérance would much rather have been without the bribed kiss, but after Mrs. Mortlake's very pointed remark she could not venture to say so; Bella hesitated for a minute, advanced a step or two, then turned once more.

'A large piece, mamma?'

'Yes, my darling, a large piece.'

Bella hesitated no longer, and Espérance, much amused, met her half way and kissed her—unluckily on both cheeks.

Bella ran back to her mother triumphantly.

'Two lumps of sugar, mamma, two big lumps, she kissed me twice!'

Espérance laughed merrily, but Mrs. Mortlake, vexed at the foolishness of her own bribe, looked annoyed.

'Nonsense, child, I said one piece.' Then, as Bella began to cry loudly, 'Ah, I knew that would come of it; it just shows you, Espérance, how careful you ought to be with children, and Bella is so very sensitive. Besides, how could you expect her to understand your French ways? I'll not have them introduced here, so please remember.'

Espérance was too surprised and indignant to attempt any vindication.

'A thousand ——' she would have said 'Pardons,' but the words stuck in her throat; she hastily substituted 'a thousand regrets,' and left the room, while Mrs. Mortlake began to bargain with her child as to the amount of sugar she should have, if she would only stop crying.

Though Espérance would often laugh in after days at the recollection of her absurd introduction to Bella, at the time she was considerably ruffled by it; it was the first time in her life that she had suffered from injustice —it was hard to be falsely blamed, and Mrs. Mortlake's slighting mention of her 'French ways' had wounded her deeply.

It was with a very heavy heart that at the appointed time she joined Cornelia and Bertha, and walked with them to the Cathedral. But comfort came to her as she entered and gazed around with wonder and awe. Whether from the beauty of the sight, or from the vastness and strength of all about her, or from a certain resemblance to Notre Dame de Paris, she did not know, but somehow she was stilled, her heart no longer throbbed indignantly, and for the first time she felt at home at Rilchester.

They walked much faster than she would have liked down the choir aisle, and she had only time for a brief glance at the nave, with its glorious vista of arch and pillar, before they passed through the screen gate, and were ushered by a prim-looking verger into the Deanery pew. The service seemed to her dull and dreary in the extreme, and though the choir was fairly good, she soon wearied of the complicated Anglican chants and lengthy canticles, in which no one attempted to join. There was

something depressing, too, in the smallness of the congregation, which certainly could not have numbered more than a dozen, and in the half-incomprehensible foreign prayers. Espérance was sadly troubled with wandering thoughts, so that she was relieved when the hour was ended, and she was free once more to devote all her eyes to the beauty around.

Cornelia, however, allowed no lingering, and they had scarcely left the Cathedral before she began in her clear, authoritative way, 'As soon as we are at home will you come to me in my room, and I will see what studies you had better take up. We must lose no more time.'

Espérance knew she ought to have been much more grateful, but there was something in Cornelia's cold kindness which grated on her, and undoubtedly there was in her tone an implied reference to the time which had already been so foolishly wasted.

It was with some difficulty that she said, 'Indeed, you are very good to think of helping me, my cousin, I know I am very ignorant.'

'If you will take pains, it will be a pleasure to me to help you,' replied Cornelia, with much more warmth. 'And I am going to give you one correction already. Do not always address me as "my cousin," it is quite unnecessary in English.'

'Indeed! I had no idea of that; in France it would be thought rude almost, not to do it. But a thousand thanks for telling me.'

The hour spent in Cornelia's room was not altogether a pleasant one. A brief examination brought to light what seemed to Cornelia almost unparalleled ignorance, and she was really in despair over such an unpromising pupil. Espérance, unaccustomed to examination of any kind, and understanding English very imperfectly, was

of course at a great disadvantage, and though now and then she would give a quick, intelligent answer, she was generally either puzzled completely, or frightened by her cousin's peremptory manner into absurd mistakes.

Cornelia, seeing that this was mere waste of time, began a lesson on physical geography, but this was not much more successful. Though exceedingly clever, she was not a good teacher; she could neither understand nor sympathise with the difficulties of a less talented mind, and even painstaking slowness made her impatient and sarcastic.

Espérance was really unhappy—aware that she had answered badly, and vexed that she had not done more justice to her father's teaching. She was certain, too, that had the circumstances been different she could have done much better, and a consciousness that Cornelia did not understand her, added to her wretchedness.

But this last thought reminded her of one of Gaspard's pieces of advice—'Whatever happens don't let yourself become a "*femme incomprise,*"' and taking courage, she began, 'You will think me shockingly ignorant, Cornelia, but really, it is partly my ignorance of English that makes me so stupid; you must not think I have never been taught these things.'

'The fruits of good teaching are seen in the impression left on the memory,' said Cornelia, calmly.

Espérance flushed angrily.

'No, no, that cannot be, I am sure it cannot; if the memory is bad, the best teaching may be thrown away to it.'

'*On* it,' corrected Cornelia, in the same impassive tone; 'but do not excite yourself so much, I surely may hold different views without rousing all this indignation.'

'It is not your views—I do not care for your views,' replied Espérance, her voice rising; 'it is your—your slights to my father, to the education he has given me, that make me angry. You do not know, you can never know, how good, how wise, how noble he was.'

'Perhaps not,' replied Cornelia. 'But if I were to judge of him by what his daughter is at present, what should I——'

Espérance burst into tears.

'You are cruel—cruel! to speak so of him—now that—ah, papa! papa! why did I not die, too?—shells falling all day long—and not one would come where it would have been welcomed!'

She was leaning down on the table, her face hidden. Would Cornelia never speak, she wondered—would no word of sympathy pass those grave lips?

But still the silence was only broken by her own sobs, and looking up, at last, she found herself alone.

She was so dismayed, so astonished, that she could not cry, even though such a desertion seemed to her most cruel;—she sat looking at Cornelia's vacant chair, and at the map of mountains and rivers on the table, soaked through and through with her own tears.

When Cornelia returned, she was quite calm, however, her tears were spent, and to her cousin's scorn and surprise, she was busily engaged in tracing the wet tear-marks on the map to the same length as the various rivers.

'I think you do not require the quiet of my study for such an intellectual employment,' said Cornelia, 'and as our lesson is over, you may go.'

Espérance could not help smiling at Cornelia's sarcasm.

'It was very foolish, was it not? I hope it has not

hurt the map,' she said, with a little laugh; '*adieu*, then, and many thanks for your lesson.'

Cornelia was mute with astonishment. She had left the room, quite out of patience with Espérance's tears, and resolved to read her a lecture on her demonstrativeness when she returned—but her plans had been frustrated, the good-humoured reply to her stinging speech, and the little ringing laugh, were even more aggravating than the sudden burst of passion, and for once in her life she felt thoroughly nonplussed. This little French girl was, indeed, a puzzle to her, but on the whole she was not altogether displeased with her for being out of the common, and as a new study of character she interested her.

Espérance, meanwhile, went downstairs, amused and a little triumphant at Cornelia's evident surprise; the consciousness of having averted a 'scene' or a lecture was exhilarating, and she was quite convinced from Cornelia's manner that something of the kind had been intended.

But her joy was short lived, for in the dining-room she found Mrs. Mortlake and Bella, eagerly looking at the last *Illustrated London News*, which was full of the horrors of the Commune.

'Oh, mamma, what are they doing to that woman?' asked Bella.

'Shooting her, darling, she has been spreading petroleum, wicked creature. And there, you see, are some houses, all falling down, in the Rue de Rivoli; the silly people are destroying their own city. And look! there they are shooting the insurgents in the Luxembourg Gardens.'

The familiar names, and the cruel want of consideration in speaking thus before her, were too much for Espérance's powers of endurance; again her tears broke forth, and not attempting a second argument, she hurriedly left the room.

But where could she go? To return to Cornelia would be to receive a double scolding, and she longed too much for sympathy to care to seek her own room—she would, at any rate, try to find Bertha before she resorted to it.

Bertha was sitting in the great drawing-room writing letters, she looked very unapproachable, but Espérance was too miserable to hesitate.

'Oh, Bertha!' she exclaimed, 'I am so unhappy, do have pity on me. Cornelia will not have me in her study, and Christabel will talk about the Commune, and I can't bear it, indeed I can't.'

'But what can I do for you?' said Bertha, gravely, but not unkindly. 'Of course you may sit here, if that is what you want.'

'Yes, I want that too; but, Bertha, if you could only love me a little—I can't live without love.'

'I thought so once,' replied Bertha, with a half smile; 'but I find I can manage without it now.' Then, as Espérance looked astonished, 'I am speaking, of course, of one's ideal of real love, not of the ordinary sort of tolerance that relationship brings.'

'I don't know what you mean,' said Espérance, half frightened. 'With us, relationship brought all that was true, and strong, and beautiful in love. Does it not to every one? do you not really love your sisters?'

'If we were not sisters we should probably hate each other,' replied Bertha; 'never were there three less congenial people, I should say; but being related, of course, we have to tolerate, or if you like "love" each other Now you understand what I mean about existing without love.'

Espérance looked aghast.

'It must be very dreadful,' she said, with a shiver.

'One grows accustomed to it in time,' replied Bertha. It will soon cease to trouble you.'

'No, that I can never believe! and until I have come to that state, you will love me a little, will you not?' and Espérance looked up so coaxingly, that Bertha was fairly conquered.

'I will try,' she said with more energy than usual. 'Only I am so unpractised that you must not expect much from me—I can't be demonstrative.'

'Never mind, I will do all the demonstration,' said Espérance, laughing, and giving Bertha what seemed to her an overwhelming embrace. 'There! now I am happy. And you will really do a little more than tolerate me?'

'You are the strangest child I ever saw,' said Bertha, but as if she did not mind the strangeness. 'Yes, I will try; but you have come to a most unlikely quarter for love.'

Espérance was, however, quite satisfied, and, moreover, she had solved the mystery of Bertha's nonchalant manner and dreamy indifference. If she neither loved nor was loved, what else could be expected? Here was an interest already at the Deanery; she would make it her special object to give Bertha pleasure.

Her letter to Gaspard that day was almost cheerful, and though she could not avoid telling him what she thought of Mrs. Mortlake and Cornelia, she dwelt so much more on Bertha's kindness, and the beauty of the Cathedral, and gave such amusing descriptions of the English manners and customs, that Gaspard was relieved from his anxiety about her, and much cheered in his loneliness.

CHAPTER XIV.

'Earth is sick
And Heaven is weary of the hollow words
Which states and kingdoms utter when they talk
Of truth and justice. Turn to private life
And social neighbourhood: look we to ourselves.
A light of duty shines on every day
For all; and yet how few are warmed or cheered!'

The Excursion.

RILCHESTER was a picturesque old town, with narrow, irregular streets, gabled houses, curious old courts, and ancient gateways. A peaceful—not to say sleepy—air pervaded the whole place; even in the principal street there was little traffic, and the few pedestrians walked quietly and leisurely along, as if hurry and bustle were a thing unknown to them.

The population was not very great, and had of late years decreased, so that although there was little actual poverty in the place, certain parts of the town had a most depressing aspect, the old houses having fallen out of repair, and the owners not caring to lay out money on them.

These deserted quarters, however, were some way from the Cathedral, and rarely, if ever, obtruded themselves upon the notice of the more wealthy citizens.

Proximity to the Cathedral being a mark of station, houses in the Close were eagerly sought after, and though they were mostly very old, draughty, and ill-built, some people had been known to leave much more comfortable dwellings for their sake. There were certainly, however, the advantages of a fine view of the Cathedral, and an open, healthy situation, not to mention one of the great

attractions to the inhabitants of Rilchester—a first-rate view of your neighbours' houses, and the best possible chance of knowing all they did.

For, like all small towns, Rilchester derived its pleasure, its store of anecdotes, its daily conversation, from gossip; and as there was but little amusement of a higher kind in the place, and a dearth of work, or, more truly, a sleepiness in the atmosphere, which tended to destroy the faculty for work, there was some excuse for this.

The arrival of a visitor at the Deanery was sufficient to set all the tongues in the place going, and when it gradually became known that the Dean had adopted his niece, and that she would thenceforth live at Rilchester, Espérance became quite a 'nine days' wonder.'

Had she only come to the place earlier in the year, when everyone was full of compassion for the whole French nation, she would have met with a much warmer welcome; but the horrors of the Commune had quite altered this feeling, and to be of French birth was the reverse of a recommendation.

Her appearance was criticised severely, and strange stories were set afloat as to her history; one old lady—well known as the greatest gossip in the Close—had told her friend that the Dean had been seen to flush quite angrily, when some one had made inquiries after M. de Mabillon—she feared he had been a most notorious character—the Dean had felt his sister's marriage most acutely, she knew this as a fact.

From this beginning arose a wild story exaggerated still more at each repetition, in which it was stated that Espérance's father had ended a most iniquitous life by attempting to betray his country to the Prussians, and had in consequence been shot, while her brother had assisted in the murder of Clément Thomas, and had subsequently

been killed as a Communistic insurgent. When it transpired that he was alive and well in London, a marvellous escape was first supposed, and afterwards added to the story as a fact.

Of course the subject was avoided both with the Collinsons and with Espérance herself, so that it was long before the truth was really known. Espérance, in consequence, thought the Rilchester people hard-hearted and unsympathising. It would have been a relief to her to talk sometimes of her father, and of their troubles in the siege, but no one opened the subject, and if she ever alluded to it, they changed the conversation at once, in reality from kindheartedness and a wish to spare her, but with what seemed of course, to her, an utter want of interest.

Those first few months tried her severely. She was very lonely, anxious about Gaspard, and out of harmony with her surroundings. Cornelia was cold and sarcastic, and her time for study was a real trial. Mrs. Mortlake was unjust and irritating; Bella, cross and spoilt; Bertha, disappointing and reserved. This, at least, was Espérance's view of the family. She had yet to learn that—

> 'Tis we, not they, who are in fault,
> When others seem so wrong.'

Of course her grievances were not wholly imaginary, but she magnified them greatly, and would not see the good points which counterbalanced the failings.

Her letters to Gaspard, which had at first been brave and cheerful, were now either in a strain of forced merriment, or with an undertone of bitterness which was very foreign to her nature. She never complained, it is true, but she indulged herself more and more in little sarcasms at the expense of her cousins or their friends, and Gaspard grew seriously uneasy about her.

He wrote to her at last, with a very gentle remonstrance, and entreating her to tell him if she were really unhappy, but the reply was far from satisfactory, and only made him still more anxious. It ran as follows:—

'*The Deanery, Rilchester, 12th September*, 1871.

'MY DEAR GASPARD,—A thousand thanks for your welcome letter, and for the scolding you give me, only I can hardly call it by such a name, since I am accustomed here to a much more severe fault-finding. So you really think I am growing sarcastic! Well, I am hardly surprised, for I am a great deal with Cornelia, and she is just one great piece of sarcasm—I suppose it is infectious. Nothing in particular has happened since I wrote. Bertha is still away and the house is very dull, the most enlivening thing being one of Bella's screaming fits, which are like a kind of intermittent fever, and come every other day. In between she is what Christabel calls "good," really petted and spoiled! She is indeed an *enfant terrible*. I forgot to say that I have had my first experience of an English dinner-party. I wish you could have seen it, it was most amusing; that is to say the evening was, for I did not dine, thus escaping an infliction of two hours. The ladies come to the drawing-room about nine, or perhaps later, looking very sleepy and bored, and then they sit trying to talk for about half-an-hour, a footman bringing in first coffee, and then tea, to prevent them from quite going to sleep! I must tell you that they are all dressed to match, the married ladies chiefly in greys, mauves, and violets, and the young ladies in limp white muslin. I suppose it is the way English people put on their clothes, but they always look as if they had been out in one of their fogs. Later in the evening the gentlemen straggle into the room, as if they didn't much want to come; they all look very black and sombre, the old gentlemen wearing

great white ties, and the younger ones stiff-looking collars, and no dress clothes at all, for they are all clergymen, there seems scarcely a layman in the place. They stand all together in a group, like so many rooks, though it is not thought improper in England for them to speak to the ladies, and perhaps two or three do venture into the circle by-and-by. I noticed the other night that there was quite a little manœuvre to secure a vacant chair. Englishmen seem so much happier when they are sitting down, they never seem to know what to do with their hands and feet, otherwise. Altogether it was very dull and stiff, but perhaps I have seen a bad specimen; people never could endure many such parties, surely, they would die of *ennui*. Why do you ask point blank if I am happy? It was inconsiderate of you. Of course I am not, and cannot be away from you. As to the Cathedral, it is marvellously beautiful, but the long daily services do not agree with me; perhaps it is being quite unaccustomed to such things, or perhaps the foreign prayers, or it may be what Mrs. Mortlake would call my "frivolous French mind," but certainly they are at present a penance.

'No one here has a good word to say for a Frenchman—they seem to think we are all Communists, and forget that the martyrs, Monseigneur Darboy, the Abbé Déguerry, Père du Coudray, and many others, were also French. It is very hard to bear. I suppose, however, the troubles are nearly over now? Have you heard lately from M. Lemercier? I hope he has not been arrested, poor man. How wonderfully in earnest he was that morning we left Paris. Write to me soon, for I live on your letters.

'With my compliments to Bismarck,

'*Je t'embrasse de tout cœur,*

'ESPÉRANCE BIEN-AIMÉE DE MABILLON.'

In reply to this letter Gaspard sent a little French edition of the English Church Services, and she was so much touched by his anxiety for her, and so really anxious to do right, that she tried very hard to attend better.

One bright, sunny morning, about the end of September, Espérance, after a greater effort than usual to listen to the Psalms, had taken her place in the uncomfortable oaken stall, which was her usual seat, and had opened her French Bible in order to follow the reading of the first lesson, when a sound of voices in the choir aisle roused her curiosity. The speakers were evidently close behind her, for she could distinctly hear even the low-toned conversation.

'No painting allowed in service time, sir.'

'What, not out here? How can I possibly disturb the service?' replied the second voice.

'Can't tell, sir,' answered the first; 'but 'tis against rules; you must move at once.'

'But I tell you, my good fellow, this is my service, just as much as it's yours to wear a black gown and carry that poker; besides, the light is perfect now.'

The reply was inaudible, but was followed by a crash, as of something falling heavily on the stone floor.

An unguarded exclamation of wrath, made itself heard so distinctly in the choir, that the reading of the lesson was for a moment suspended, and the two vergers, seizing their silver-headed staves, hastened to quiet the disturbance.

Espérance listened with hushed breath, really quite trembling for the victim. She heard a great many repetitions of 'hush,' then the eager voice rising again, 'I was doing no harm here.'

Another admonitory 'hush' followed by a whispered altercation, then that voice once more.

'Well, since I mayn't paint, I will come in.'

The footsteps drew nearer; Espérance, and indeed everybody looked curiously towards the door—with a stately, measured step, the two vergers returned, their staves triumphantly raised in air, and behind them walked the culprit, a young man of two or three and twenty, tall and handsome, his fair complexion a little flushed by the dispute, his lips gravely compressed, but an irrepressible sparkle of amusement in his keen, blue eyes.

He was solemnly conducted to a seat, and after one rapid glance around, Espérance was relieved to see that he behaved with perfect reverence, joining in the Te Deum in a way which set an example to the silent congregation, and during the reading of the second lesson, scarcely stirring, but gazing at the reredos and the grand east window, through which the sunshine was streaming, shedding an exquisite radiance on all around.

At the close of the service, Mrs. Mortlake made all speed to go out, but not before the stranger had already left the choir. Whispering an explanation to Cornelia, she followed in the direction of the north choir aisle, closely attended by Espérance, who was full of curiosity, and in great terror lest Cornelia should call her back.

In the aisle they discovered the cause of the downfall and the angry exclamation—a prostrate easel and canvas; the young artist had just raised the latter, and was looking at it critically, when Mrs. Mortlake approached.

'Mr. Magnay! how are you? You have, indeed, taken us by surprise!'

'I came late last night,' replied the artist, glancing from Mrs. Mortlake to Espérance, as he shook hands. 'I was hoping to call on you later in the day, not thinking that the Cathedral might be our meeting-place. The Dean is well, I hope?'

'Very well, thank you, he will be glad to see you, I am sure,' replied Mrs. Mortlake, moving towards the door.

Claude Magnay hastened to move the easel, which lay in Espérance's way, and walked down the aisle with them, holding open the heavy outer door while Mrs. Mortlake uttered many last words.

'You are here for some time, then?' she asked.

'I cannot tell how long,' he replied. 'I have a commission for a view of this interior. One could not have a more delightful subject, certainly. How glorious it is in this light!'

Espérance thought the grand old doorway, with its sombre mouldings, the eager, half-wistful face of Claude Magnay, and the background dim with brightness, would have made a wonderful picture; but detecting a slight shade of impatience, and a restless movement of the hand which held the canvas, she was not sorry when Mrs. Mortlake closed the conversation with a pressing invitation to dinner that evening and really turned homewards.

'What a thorough artist he is, to be sure!' she exclaimed, half musingly. 'So engrossed with his work, and with the beauty of the Cathedral, that he forgot even to speak of the disturbance he made during the service!'

'Is he English?' inquired Espérance, secretly wondering whether any one so polite could be, her dislike to the Rilchester people having prejudiced her against the whole nation.

'Yes, oh yes,' replied Mrs. Mortlake. 'I am not sure that the name is not of Scotch origin, but the family has been in England for years. This young man's father was an architect—a very clever man—and a friend of my father's. He had great money losses before his death, and had it not been for Claude's talent, I don't know how they

would have managed. However, all is comfortably settled now; one sister is married, and has taken the youngest child to live with her, the mother died not long ago, and so Claude has only himself to support.'

Espérance thought this a very heartless speech, but the mention of the losses, the bereavements, and the loneliness, touched a chord in her own life, and for the first time since her arrival, she felt thoroughly interested and attracted.

The day passed rather more happily than usual, and Espérance was quite in spirits when she went to dress for dinner; she could not help looking forward, eagerly, to the diversion of seeing someone really new, and not an inhabitant of Rilchester.

Claude had already arrived when she came down, and was standing talking to the Dean, having quite lost the somewhat preoccupied expression he had worn in the Cathedral.

The Dean gravely introduced 'My niece, Mdlle. de Mabillon'—he always uttered the name with an effort—and Claude's easy, but courteous manners seemed all the more pleasant when contrasted with her uncle's pompous solemnity.

'I am afraid you were one of those whom I disturbed this morning in the Cathedral,' he said. 'I hope you will forgive me for the confusion I made; was it very distracting?'

Espérance's first impulse was to utter the false, 'Oh! not at all,' a form of polite lying proverbially habitual to Frenchwomen, and not unfrequently indulged in by their English sisters. She had, however, been brought up very carefully in this respect by her father, her standard of truth was high, and with ready tact she said instead, 'I do not think it disturbed the congregation generally,

for myself, I cannot say much, it takes such a small thing to draw off my attention.'

'I had no idea there was any rule, as to not painting during service time, so I hope my ignorance may be my excuse,' said Claude, turning to the Dean.

'Oh, don't mention it, pray, it is of no consequence. We find we must have a rule of the kind, but of course you could not be expected to know. You find your subject interesting?'

'Indeed I do,' replied Claude, earnestly. 'It's only fault is, that every part of it is so marvellous, one hardly dares to attempt it. I went in at half-past six this morning, but it was some time before I could settle to work, everything was looking so exquisite.'

'We never saw your picture this morning,' said Espérance. 'Was it hurt in that downfall?'

'No, luckily it was not much damaged, it was the easel which made all the noise.'

Mrs. Mortlake and Cornelia entered while he was speaking, the former with many apologies for her lateness, and immediately after dinner was announced.

The conversation was much more lively than usual, and Espérance was able to enter into it thoroughly; her English was much improved by the three months she had spent at Rilchester, and her slight French accent was rather pretty than otherwise.

Mrs. Mortlake, however, did not altogether approve of this advance in knowledge, for although she could not accuse Espérance of forwardness, yet there was certainly something in her lively chatter which was apt to swamp other conversation. The Dean would often stop to listen to her—the voice reminded him of his sister's, and he liked to hear it—Cornelia was always on the watch for grammatical mistakes in her pupil, and Bertha, who dis-

liked the exertion of talking, thought herself exempted from it, if anyone else sustained the conversation.

Mrs. Mortlake herself was a good, solid talker, and she liked to have an open field for her operations, so Espérance's little flighty remarks, and her clear, ringing laugh, annoyed her; and when she found Claude Magnay much more inclined to talk to the bright little French girl, than to enter into the conversation which she had carefully prepared beforehand on the Renascence, she resolved to put a stop to it at once.

Claude had just said that he had studied chiefly at Paris, and Espérance, with a look of delight, was pouring out a stream of eager questions. Whereabouts had he lived? Did he not like Paris? Was it not the most beautiful city of Europe? When was he last there? He had not been in France during the war, then?

As if to provoke Mrs. Mortlake still further, Claude seemed to catch something of Espérance's enthusiasm, for his replies were as animated as her questions, and it was evident that if they were not interrupted, the Renascence would be quite neglected.

'You were at Paris all through the siege, did you say?' Claude was asking.

And Espérance had just begun her answer when Mrs. Mortlake broke in.

'Oh, really Espérance you must not take Mr. Magnay all through that dreadful siege, we have heard quite enough of it, and the dinner table is not the place for horrors.'

Claude Magnay was surprised, and glanced at Espérance as if for an explanation. She had flushed all over, and her lips were quivering; he was sorry for her, and would have tried to turn Mrs. Mortlake's uncomfortable speech to some different meaning, but she was too quick for him, and the next moment the conversation was entirely in her hands.

'I was wanting so much to ask you, if you had seen that magnificent altar-piece of Perugino's in the church of St. Peter, Perugia. You were in Italy last winter, were you not?'

Whereupon ensued a long account of Mr. Magnay's Italian tour, stimulated by Mrs. Mortlake's peculiar form of questioning.

Espérance meanwhile had recovered herself and sat proudly erect, without betraying any desire to join in the conversation. She was wounded by her cousin's most unfair speech, for it had assumed that she was in the habit of talking about her sufferings in the siege, whereas the subject had scarcely been mentioned since her arrival, and she had, moreover, made an unjust insinuation as to her good taste.

'Horrors at the dinner table!' the very idea of being suspected of mentioning anything of the sort, made her blush anew.

Her indignation gradually died away, however; the mention of Paris, and other familiar names, had recalled all her sad memories, and it was as much from this sadness, as from the effects of Mrs. Mortlake's snub, that she answered all Claude's further attempts at conversation in monosyllables.

Only once was she at all roused. It was at dessert; the Dean was advising Claude Magnay to explore some of the old parts of Rilchester, thinking that the half ruinous and very ancient buildings could not fail to please an artist. This led to a comparison of Cathedral cities with ordinary towns, wherein Claude expressed his opinions so very candidly, that Espérance quite trembled for him. To her dismay she found herself implicated in the conversation. Claude and Mrs. Mortlake carried on quite a little argument, as to the dangers of narrowness in a limited commu-

nity, Mrs. Mortlake upholding her beloved Cathedral town in everything. Of course, the discussion was perfectly good-humoured, but unluckily, Claude, glancing round the table with his quick artist eye to gather the expressions of the different people, was attracted by Espérance's sad, wistful face, and without thinking asked, 'And what is your opinion? you are a comparative stranger, and must be unbiassed. Do you think Cathedral towns superior?'

Espérance was in great difficulties; she would not willingly have offended her relations, but truth was truth, and she was too tired and sad-hearted to be ready with any skilful counter-question, or laughing allusion, with which to change the subject.

With an appealing, 'How can you ask me?' in her eyes, she replied, quietly, 'I love the Cathedral as much as I dislike the town.'

Cornelia looked up, quickly.

'Your reasons?'

Espérance looking much distressed, tried to confine her remarks to the material town, though the previous conversation had related to the society.

'The streets are so narrow and dirty, and there are so very few people——' she paused, and for once was greatly relieved by one of Mrs. Mortlake's cutting little speeches.

'Oh, yes, we know your ideas of the beautiful are different, you care for nothing but *boulevards*.'

Again Espérance flushed crimson, again Claude felt sorry for her, and this time he was vexed that she should suffer from his rashness; however, he had no opportunity for making amends, for the ladies left the table almost directly, and in the evening the Dean

carried him off to his observatory, and kept him so thoroughly interested with his telescope that all else was forgotten.

CHAPTER XV.

'She said, "I am aweary, aweary;
I would that I were dead!"'

TENNYSON.

CLAUDE MAGNAY was young and energetic, by no means one of those lazy prodigies, whose very genius seems to dull their other powers. Since he could not work in the Cathedral from nine to ten, he resolved to take the first hours of the day, and often by five o'clock he would be at his post, or wandering about in the grey morning light enjoying the dim grandeur of the place, and with the key which the Dean himself had placed at his disposal, unlocking the inner doors and exploring at his pleasure until the lights were favourable for his picture.

During service time he returned to his hotel for breakfast, and afterwards worked at his open-air paintings—some curious parts of old Rilchester, and an exterior of the Cathedral. His days were so well filled that he was not very much pleased when one evening a note arrived, with a proposal which must either usurp some of his precious time, or occasion a longer stay at Rilchester. It ran as follows:—

'DEAR MR. MAGNAY,—I am so very anxious to have a portrait of my little girl. Do you think you could spare time to paint her? There is no one whom I should like better to do it. Your picture of Lady Worthington's little boy, which I saw this year at the Academy, was perfect.

'Bella could give you a sitting at any hour, the morning is, I think, her best time, but please suit your own convenience.

'Believe me, yours very sincerely,
'CHRISTABEL MORTLAKE.'

'That little fair-haired girl, who looks so cross,' soliloquised Claude; 'she will be a difficult subject, in more ways than one, if I am not mistaken. Shall I attempt her, or shall I find it necessary to return to town, and work up my Scotch pictures? Rather shirking perhaps, still I hate painting spoilt children, and that Mrs. Mortlake will be the death of me. How that poor little Mdlle. de—something—endures it, I can't imagine—snubs at every turn from one sister, and sarcasms from the other. I got her into a scrape myself the other evening, and never helped her out, which was a shame. Yes, I will undertake little Miss Mortlake's portrait for that reason—the little *demoiselle* looks as if she needed a Don Quixote. And now I think of it, what an interesting study her face would be. Those lustrous eyes—such a colour, too, and so wonderfully pathetic, and her quaint little mouth, which looks somehow as if the sadness were all a mistake. The forehead—? yes, it is low, and the hair dark and silky, with a wave in it. She is the very impersonation of what I always longed to try—"Mariana in the Moated Grange,"' and he repeated the lines:—

'After the flitting of the bats,
When thickest dark did trance the sky,
She drew her casement curtain by,
And glanced athwart the glooming flats.
She only said, "The night is dreary,
He cometh not," she said;
She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!"'

'Yes! she is exactly what I have dreamt of. I must at least get a sketch of her face, though I suppose it would hardly do to ask her to sit to me.'

He drew pencil and paper towards him, and sketched Espérance's face from memory, but not altogether successfully. Dissatisfied with the attempt, he tore it in pieces, and lighting his cigar, gave himself up to a deep meditation, in which the further imagining of 'Mariana' bore a prominent part.

After morning service the next day, Claude went to the Deanery, there to undertake the not very congenial task of painting Bella Mortlake's portrait.

Mrs. Mortlake was delighted to have obtained her wish.

'The dear child is quite at her best. I was so very anxious that she should be painted now—I am so glad you can spare the time. Espérance, run and fetch Bella.'

Claude arranged his easel, discussed size and position with Mrs. Mortlake, set his palette, waited and fidgetted, but still no Bella appeared. At length a distant screaming was heard, drawing gradually nearer. Mrs. Mortlake hastened to the door and listened. Espérance's voice was heard remonstrating.

'Bella dear, you must come down, Mr. Magnay is waiting for you. See, then, I must leave you and call nurse.'

No answer but screams.

Mrs. Mortlake hurried to the scene of action, and Bella was borne into the dining-room, kicking with all her might.

Claude shrugged his shoulders, and glanced at his 'Mariana.' She was paler and sadder-looking than ever, and as she stood waiting for Bella's sobs to cease, there was a drooping hopelessness about her very attitude which

Claude longed to catch. He hastily sketched an outline, and watched her varying expression almost breathlessly.

Bella was sobbing out something about 'Espérance,' and Mrs. Mortlake, without waiting to find what the real grievance was, turned round with a severity of tone and look quite out of proportion even to the imagined offence.

'Espérance, how often must I tell you not to interfere with my management of Bella?—these crying fits are far more frequent since you came. Why do you aggravate the poor child?'

'Indeed, Christabel, Bella was crying because she did not want to leave the nursery. I only——'

'Ah! that is always the way—excuses always ready! No, do not attempt to evade the truth. You know quite well the child is good with everyone else. It really is most provoking! Here is all Mr. Magnay's time wasted, and Bella's face so swollen with crying that she cannot possibly have her picture taken.'

Espérance did not reply. A look of sudden pain passed over her features, her eyes grew more despairingly miserable—her whole face was expressive of the sense of isolation and injustice.

Claude drank in her whole aspect and bearing almost greedily, thrilled through and through with the delight of thus grasping his subject. It was not till a mist of tears dimmed those bright eyes that his human nature began to be touched by the sight of suffering, and half ashamed of his artistic rapture he turned eagerly to Mrs. Mortlake.

'Pray don't think you are wasting my time; and as to Miss Bella's face, I expect it will soon be sunny again. Ah!—I thought so,' as Bella, who was the most arrant little flirt, looked up smiling, and inclined to be propitiated by his attention.

There was some little difficulty about the placing. One chair was too high, and another too low, and it ended in Mrs. Mortlake's sending Espérance to the library to fetch one of the large books for Bella to sit on.

Claude, who after his momentary forgetfulness, had suddenly become very human and very polite, hurried after her to carry the bulky volume. She was standing by the bookshelves when he entered, pulling not very energetically at *Webster's Dictionary.*

'Let me help you,' he exclaimed; 'this is a famous book indeed, but too heavy for you.'

She thanked him, and would have turned away, but he detained her.

'I wanted to tell you how sorry I am to have been partly the cause of all this—to do;' he would have said 'this scolding,' but prudently refrained.

'You are very good, but indeed I do not see that you caused it. It is always the same,' said Espérance, wearily, with the hopeless 'Mariana' look again.

Claude was full of sympathy, but only ventured to say, 'Miss Bella is somewhat trying I should fancy. I hope you will give me your help during the sittings, for she will soon look upon me as her arch-tormentor.'

This was all that passed between them the first day, but it was the foundation of a strong mutual liking. Claude of course admired the subject of his future picture, and felt sorry for one who was doomed to live with Mrs. Mortlake, while Espérance naturally clung to anyone who showed her the least sympathy or kindness, and looked upon Claude Magnay as one of her greatest friends.

Had she been a little older, or had her home training been less simple, she might have been in danger of falling in love; as it was, however, the thought never entered her head. Claude's kindness, and his little attentions,

were too pitying to be at all lover-like, and Espérance, accustomed to live entirely with men, was far more at home with him than with her cousins, and regarded him as a sort of English substitute for Gaspard.

They had several opportunities of meeting, for Claude was often asked to lunch or to dinner, and Bella was so refractory that her portrait required several sittings. Mrs. Mortlake soon wearied of attending to these, and the duty of keeping the child quiet devolved upon Espérance; and though at first her confidences were checked by a pretty demureness, she soon found that a sympathetic listener was too delightful to be resisted.

Gradually Claude learnt her whole history. She dwelt long on the happy years at the Château, describing her favourite haunts among the ruins, telling him of the prim old garden with its terraces, its clipped yews, its mazes and grassy paths, and painting the surrounding country in such glowing terms, that Claude promised her at some future day to visit it himself, and bring her back a picture of her beloved mountains of Auvergne.

A few questions elicited the whole story of the siege, and the relief of speaking again of her father and of Gaspard, after the long enforced silence, was so great, that this alone would have made her fond of Claude.

He was really interested and touched by her sad history, and let her see it.

'Your brother is in London still, then?' he inquired, when she had finished the story by telling of her arrival at Rilchester.

'Yes, he is still at Pentonville, but he has not heard of any work yet. There seem so many French exiles in London, and that, of course, makes it more difficult for him.'

'I am afraid I cannot be of much use in helping him,

but still I will bear it in mind. You must give me an introduction to him, and then I shall be able to give him an account of you and your Rilchester home.'

'Oh, thank you, you are so good,' said Espérance, gratefully; then, with a sudden look of fear, 'but you must not let him think I am unhappy. You will not tell him anything that could trouble him?'

Claude promised to be most careful, and delicately turned the conversation, though he was not a little curious to know if the 'Moated Grange' were a real necessity for 'Mariana.'

One afternoon, early in October, Espérance, as a most unusual favour, was invited to take a walk with her uncle. He was in the habit of taking a 'constitutional' every day, accompanied by Cornelia, his favourite daughter; but on this particular afternoon Cornelia was unable to go, and the Dean had himself asked Espérance to take her place. Half pleased, half frightened, she set out, suiting her pace to her uncle's slow and rather infirm steps, and now and then venturing little remarks, which, however, failed to attract the Dean's notice. It was not till they had walked for at least half-a-mile that he even heard her voice, but then he roused himself from his brown study and looked down at her kindly.

'I am used to such a silent companion, my dear, that I am out of the habit of talking. But go on, for I like the sound of your voice, it is like poor Amy's.'

'Is it?' said Espérance, much pleased. 'I should like to be like my mother. Am I in other things?'

But the topic was not a good one for conversation. The Dean shook his head and sighed deeply, then again relapsed into profound meditation.

Espérance was disappointed. She had hoped to hear something of her mother; but though she talked obediently,

half to herself, half to her uncle, she could not obtain any answer.

It was certainly a little dull, and it was scarcely surprising that her heart gave a great bound of delight, when in the distance she perceived Claude Magnay and one of the Minor Canons coming towards them. Someone who could talk would be such an inestimable blessing! and her pleasure was complete when, on their approach, the Dean, suddenly starting from his reverie, shook hands cordially with the two young men, said it was time he should be turning home, and entering into conversation with Mr. White, the Minor Canon, left Espérance to follow with Claude.

'I have been enjoying your flat landscape,' began Claude. 'Mr. White has taken me a glorious walk.'

He looked so fresh and cheerful that Espérance quite envied him.

'Do you really like the country about here?' she asked, wonderingly. 'I think it is the ugliest I ever saw; so bare, and flat, and wide, it quite tires one's eyes.'

'I think it has a beauty of its own,' said Claude, 'though, perhaps, you have to look carefully to see it. Of course I don't mean to say I prefer it to a mountainous country, but I think it is unjustly abused. Whatever people say, I shall always maintain that there is beauty in—

"The level waste, the rounding grey."'

'Ah! that just expresses it,' said Espérance. 'It is all so grey, and sombre, and dreary.'

'Not all,' said Claude, pausing beside a field gate which commanded an extensive view. 'Now, look at this; here is the greenest of grass in the foreground—cows grazing—as much colour as you could wish in that tiled cottage, and the faint blue smoke rising into that perfect

sky; then out beyond you have a boundless expanse. See—this side is flooded with light, while over there you have the dark shadow of that cloud; then quite in the distance it does all fade into "the rounding grey," but you must own, now, that it is beautiful.'

Espérance drew a long breath.

'Yes! it is, indeed, but I should never have seen all that by myself. I am glad you showed me.'

'I am proud to have introduced you to your own country,' said Claude, smiling.

'Not my own!' she exclaimed, indignantly.

'Ah! of course not, I forgot,' said Claude, amused by her earnestness. 'Your Auvergne scenery is, doubtless, much more beautiful, but you will not call this ugly any more?'

'No, indeed, I will not, and you will tell Gaspard when you see him that you have quite converted me, for I have sent him most unfavourable accounts of the country.'

'I will certainly tell him,' said Claude. 'I shall try to see him next week.'

'Do you leave Rilchester so soon?'

'Yes, I leave to-morrow,' replied Claude. 'My commission is finished, and it is time I was at home again.'

'I am so sorry,' said Espérance, simply. 'But it is delightful to think of your seeing Gaspard so soon, though, it makes me a little envious.'

'You will be coming up to town soon, perhaps,' suggested Claude.

Espérance shook her head.

'I don't see how that can be, but of course I hope, or else I could not get on at all; my motto in life must be—"*Espérez toujours.*"'

'It is certainly a good one,' replied Claude, musingly,

but in his artist-soul longing to catch once more the hopeless look which he wished to represent in his picture.

It did not return that afternoon, but the next day, when he paid his farewell call to the Deanery, all the expression of dejection, misery, and hopelessness, was there in full force. Espérance was evidently in disgrace, while Mrs. Mortlake and Cornelia were in that disturbed, ruffled state, which betokens a family disagreement; and although Mrs. Mortlake was particularly cordial, Claude detected subdued irritation in the forced tone of her voice.

Espérance scarcely spoke, but sat looking half-abstractedly out of the window, her knitting lying untouched on her knee, her hands tightly clasped.

Claude could not have wished for a better opportunity, but now that his desire was granted he began to feel such pity for Espérance, that he would far rather have missed seeing her.

He tried to draw her into the conversation, but without success; she answered with constraint, and only looked more miserable.

At last he rose to go, took leave of Mrs. Mortlake and Cornelia, and then turned to Espérance, determined that she should at least speak to him.

'You will not forget our walk yesterday, and the beauties of level country?' he said, smiling.

She coloured painfully, and her hand trembled as Claude took it in his.

'What message may I take for you to your brother?' he asked.

Her colour deepened, the tears rose to her eyes, and her voice was low and tremulous as she answered.

'Tell him, please, that I am very well, that—that I will write soon——'

She broke off abruptly, not daring to trust her voice

any longer, and Claude, seeing that it was sheer cruelty to keep her, said good-bye, tried to put Mrs. Mortlake in a good humour by leaving a playful message for Bella, and alluding to her prettiness, then left the house, dissatisfied and perplexed.

Espérance was really almost desperate. Claude could hardly have chosen a more unfavourable time for his visit, for as he had rightly judged he had come in during a dispute, if indeed that could be called disputing, in which two leagued against one refused to listen to reason or justice.

It all arose from a simple remark made by Espérance. She casually mentioned Claude's intended departure, and this led to an account of their walk on the preceding day. Mrs. Mortlake, ever ready to find fault, declared that she behaved with far too much freedom, that she ought to have kept beside the Dean, and not allowed herself a *tête-à-tête* with Claude Magnay.

Espérance explained that this had not been possible, and owned that it had never occurred to her that any one could think so simple an act improper.

Whereat Mrs. Mortlake accused her of speaking disrespectfully, denounced her 'French' manners, and losing all prudence and justice in her anger, said that all along she had been flirting with Claude.

Espérance was so entirely innocent in this respect that for a moment she was too much surprised and shocked to refute the charge. She was unaccustomed to society, and knew little either of French or English *etiquette*, and her father had been well content to leave her without any artificial rules, beyond those of natural good breeding. While she paused Cornelia uttered one of her cold sarcasms.

'Never mind, Christabel, you know the proverb,

"French women know how to make nets, but not cages."'

Then Espérance had lost all self-control, and with flashing eyes had turned upon her cousins.

'You may talk about French women as you like, but I will let you know that such a speech as that would never have passed the lips of those whom you despise—they at least do not speak rudely. And what you say is false—untrue—unjust. Such an idea would never have entered my head if you had not suggested it—no, never!'

Cornelia, a little vexed at her own most unwarrantable speech, tried to calm her down, and entered into a long disquisition on the folly of losing temper in an argument; but Espérance scarcely heard, her anger had died away, and she could only dwell in grief and dismay on the accusation brought against her.

While Cornelia was still speaking Claude had been announced, and it may well be imagined that Espérance was embarrassed and self-conscious,—for the first time in her life, however. Shame, annoyance, and unutterable longing for Gaspard, were filling her heart, and Claude's kindness and the thought of his proposed visit to her brother, proved too much for her very imperfect self-control.

By the time he was fairly out of the room she was crying unrestrainedly, and was far too miserable to heed Cornelia's long harangue on the duty of self-mastery.

Mrs. Mortlake might well feel dismayed at the tempest she had raised, but she was too much blinded by conceit to see the full extent of the harm she had done. She made some pretensions to virtue, and was consequently vexed that an exaggerated, if not wholly untrue, accusation had escaped her, but rather than own herself in the wrong she still stood by it, and though conscience pricked her into making

some useless attempts to pacify Espérance, she would not retract what she had said.

The breach between the cousins was in consequence greatly widened, and the effect on Espérance was most disastrous. She grew more and more ready to see faults in all around her, her face rarely lost its expression of hopeless suffering, her manners lost much of their grace and ease, and, worst of all, Mrs. Mortlake's perpetual fault finding began to make her self-conscious and introspective. She gave up even attempting to love her cousins, and consequently was at once open to all those faults from which she had hitherto been free. When love—which had been her guard and strength all her life—was allowed to die, selfishness at once stepped in, bringing in its train false pride, discontent, suspicion, and a morbid sensitiveness; while what had formerly been courageous patience was turned into a falsely-assumed callousness and indifference.

The only things which kept her from utter ruin were Gaspard's letters, full of the old love and confidence—although her answers were most disappointing—and the remembrance of her father. Even these did not hinder her from sinking very low, but they kept one soft spot in her heart, which could never alter.

CHAPTER XVI.

> 'Find out men's wants and will,
> And meet them there. All worldly joys go less
> To the one joy of doing kindnesses.'
>
> G. Herbert.

While Espérance was passing through hard experiences at Rilchester, Gaspard was being tried, though in a different way, in London. They were each strangely

altered; but while, with Espérance, trouble seemed working so much harm, with Gaspard it was very different. He had been too thoroughly roused by the events of the past year ever to fall back again to the selfishness which had been his chief fault, and for which his present enforced loneliness seemed to him but a just retribution. His patience was being sorely tried by the long and apparently fruitless waiting time; but as, week by week, his longing for work and action increased, and his poverty grew more and more irksome, an inner strength and power of endurance grew too, and his restlessness and self-seeking were gradually subdued.

He had, however, suffered greatly, and in outward appearance was as much changed as Espérance, for his poverty was not comparative, but actual hunger and want. Then, too, the state of France, and the fearful accounts of the Commune and its suppression, made him miserable enough; while his anxiety for Espérance, and the pain of knowing that she was unhappy and changed, without the possibility of helping her, was perhaps the worst trouble of all.

Although work was not to be had, he would not give up all hope of obtaining it in time, and employed himself in thoroughly mastering the English language, knowing that it would be of great use to him.

One afternoon late in October he was hard at work at a difficult piece of translation, when the landlady, with quite a beaming face, announced a visitor. Gaspard glanced at the card, which was, as he had expected, that of Mr. Magnay, for Espérance had mentioned his intended visit in her last letter.

He hastened to greet him, with the heartiness of real pleasure, for like poor Espérance, he was greatly in need of some one to talk to, and though the landlady was both

kind-hearted and conversational, he was beginning to weary of her stock of prosy anecdotes, and of trying to communicate his thoughts to the sleek, purring Bismarck.

Even if Claude had been the most uninteresting of mortals he would have been welcomed; and when Gaspard found that he was a thorough gentleman, a good talker, and, unlike the proverbial Englishman, neither proud, suspicious, nor reserved, he threw all possible warmth and friendliness into his manner, and before long the two were talking as intimately as if they had known each other for years.

They were a strange contrast. Claude, fair haired and fresh complexioned, the picture of health, with bright, genial manners and almost superfluous energy. Gaspard, pallid and emaciated, his clearly-cut features bespeaking delicacy of constitution, and his animated conversation and ready smile rather belied by the suffering look which his face wore when in repose.

They had talked long about the Franco-Prussian war, and Gaspard had related his experiences as a National Guard, before Claude delivered Espérance's message, and then naturally the conversation turned upon Rilchester.

'It must be very dull, indeed, according to my sister's account,' said Gaspard. 'I hear that Cathedral towns have rather that reputation in England.'

'It is a small, decayed town, certainly,' replied Claude, 'but though perhaps it is narrower, I doubt if it is more dull than most provincial places. This is not the first time I have stayed there, and I assure you there is really very good society there, if you can pick and choose. There are cliques, of course, but one can keep out of them, or perhaps get into them all.'

'You can, of course,' said Gaspard, smiling, 'but that is only because you are a privileged being—a celebrity.

I imagine that the Deanery would not care to follow your example.'

'To tell you the truth, the Deanery heads the narrowest clique of all,' replied Claude, 'and I fancy that is why your sister is a little unjust to the whole of Rilchester; she only sees the most ponderous and dull part of the place. I have heard Mrs. Mortlake boast that they are only intimate with the families of the Bishop and the Archdeacon.'

Gaspard could not help smiling.

'Espérance has sent me laughable accounts of the stiff dinner-parties, and this explains it all, they must indeed be narrow-minded.'

'You do not know Dean Collinson personally?' asked Claude, half doubtfully.

Gaspard flushed a little.

'No, hitherto he has been no friend to our family, but he has been very good in helping us now—that is to say, he has provided for Espérance. You can understand, however, that dependence is not altogether pleasing, under the circumstances. I am afraid it is doing Espérance no good. Did you think her looking happy?'

It was an awkward question; Claude paused for a moment, then said, 'Hardly happy, I think, but I am sure she is inclined to make the best of things; she told me that her motto in life was "*Espérez toujours.*"'

'Poor child!' said Gaspard, with a sigh.

There was a moment's silence, during which Claude watched his companion's troubled face with a great deal of interest.

His next question, however, was almost as hard to answer.

'And our relatives, are they kind hearted? Do not shrink from telling me your real opinion, for I want really to know.'

'The Dean is thoroughly good and kind,' said Claude, reflectively, 'absent and indifferent in many things, and engrossed a good deal by his favourite hobby, astronomy, but I have never seen him otherwise than kind and courteous.'

'And is he fond of Espérance?'

'I cannot tell, but I think he must be. I remember, too, I met them out walking together one day.'

Gaspard was pleased and relieved, and inquired after the other members of the family.

'I really cannot tell what they are like,' said Claude, hesitatingly. 'Mrs. Mortlake varies a great deal. Usually she is one of those would-be gracious ladies, whom one rather distrusts; she is quite devoted to her little girl, though. I know little of the other daughters; the elder is very learned and the chief confidante of her father, the younger very silent and indifferent.'

Gaspard sat musing over this account of the family at the Deanery, and Claude, fearing that a further catechism might elicit more than Espérance wished her brother to know, rose to take leave, not, however, before he had given Gaspard his address at St. John's Wood, and made him promise to visit him very soon.

The next week brought a letter from Espérance, but it was no comfort to Gaspard, for though, still, she would not give words to her complaint, the tone of the letter was bitter and discontented. Only one sentence was there in the whole sheet to which Gaspard cared to revert; it was the following:—

'I think of you so often in your loneliness, *mon ami*, and am very glad Mr. Magnay has made you a visit. He was very kind to me here, or really I think I should have ceased to believe in any kind of goodness. Rilchester is like the stagnant water in the ruined fountain at Mabillon,

when it got half frozen over in the winter, and the people are like the unhappy, stiff-looking water-lilies.'

Gaspard folded the letter sadly enough, then, anxious to escape from his own thoughts, and partly reminded by Espérance's reference, he set out to pay his promised call on Claude Magnay.

Having found his house—a large and rather gloomy one, with a northern aspect—Gaspard was ushered upstairs by a mischievous-looking little page to the studio, where he found Claude hard at work, finishing one of his Scotch pictures.

'I am afraid I have come at a busy time,' said Gaspard. 'You must forgive an idle man for his want of consideration.'

Claude had seemed scarcely to notice his entrance—it was but for a moment, however. Gaspard had not finished his sentence before he had thrown down his brushes and mahl-stick, and hastened forward.

'I am so glad you have come! no, indeed, I am not busy, only I did not hear you announced. Either that young monkey of a page was afraid of your foreign name, or else I was dreaming over that Scotch waterfall.'

'That was it, evidently,' replied Gaspard, smiling. 'For you would have been amused to hear your boy's version of my name—"Dull Muddle on."'

Claude laughed heartily.

'That boy really surpasses! If you knew the pranks he is up to! I only keep him because of his face—substitute wings for buttons, and you have the most angelic creature. See!' and he pointed to a canvas on one of his easels. 'I have him in progress now, wings and all, with a background of clouds. It would be delightful to have him in next year's Academy—No. 131, "Master John Jones!" I declare I will do it.'

Gaspard laughed. There was something so novel to him in the whole proceeding that he quite forgot his troubles, and sat listening amusedly to Claude, who was in high spirits after a long day's work, and kept up a continuous flow of talk. There was a certain charm, too, about the curious room, which was half studio, half sitting-room, and very untidy and bachelor-like. The furniture was irregular in the extreme, high-backed chairs, an antique mirror, and a carved oak table, were strangely mingled with modern appliances, while colours of every description were to be found in an unwarrantable number of curtains and rugs, the latter relieving the stained and polished floor. Claude, in his loose working jacket and red smoking-cap, furnished another incongruous element, and Gaspard could scarcely believe that this light-hearted fellow could be the presiding genius of the place, and the creator, as it were, of the wealth of pictures scattered all over the room.

He asked leave to look at some of them, and Claude's wistful gravity at once returned, while, with no pretence of mock humility, but rather with the fondness of a parent, he exhibited his works.

Two or three of his Rilchester pictures, not yet framed, were standing on the top of a low bookcase, and Gaspard was, of course, much interested in them. One was of the exterior of the Cathedral, and Claude took it in his hand to place it in a better light, while he tried to describe the position of the Deanery. But Gaspard did not heed him —his eyes were fixed on the picture which had stood behind, and which was now fully revealed. It was unfinished, but not so as to take away from the effect. A dusky foreground, just showing a tattered curtain and mouldering wall, a casement window, through which the moonlight was streaming, and a glimpse of a wide

plain, glimmering here and there with the faint brightness of light reflected in a watery marsh. Standing by the window, her hand on the fastening, as if in the act of closing it, stood Espérance, her face plainly revealed by the cold light of the moon, and full of hopeless misery, while disappointment and weariness were expressed in her listless, drooping figure.

Gaspard gazed on as if he could never take his eyes from her face, and Claude, who had not intended him to see it at all, was both vexed and puzzled. That he had recognised his sister was undoubted; he could hardly fail, then, to know the full extent of her unhappiness. It was certainly a most unlucky accident.

It was a relief when, at length, Gaspard spoke, though his repressed voice was not reassuring.

'You painted it at Rilchester, then?'

'No, oh, no. I merely got an idea from your sister's face, made a sketch of it, and am now working it up as "Mariana in the Moated Grange." I hope you will not think I took a great liberty. You must allow for the license of an artist.'

'Do not think I mind that for an instant,' said Gaspard. 'But that hopeless wretchedness and dejection! Has she really come to that? I knew she must be changed, but that is surely exaggerated.'

Claude would have given a great deal to have been able to answer in the affirmative, but it was impossible; nor would he equivocate. After a moment's thought, he answered, 'I saw that expression on her face, but of course it was not always there; at times she was quite bright and merry.'

'She used to be the merriest child in all France,' sighed Gaspard.

He was still looking sadly at the picture, when the

door was opened by Claude's 'Child Angel,' who announced, with truly Cockney pronunciation—'Lady Worthington.'

Claude hastened forward to receive his visitor, and Gaspard, recognising the name, and looking up rather curiously, saw a tall and peculiarly graceful woman, middle-aged yet still young looking, her fine, classical features, bright, humorous eyes, and ready smile, full of attraction, while her complexion, though a little worn, retained much of its bloom.

There was something very fascinating about her manner, and Gaspard's opinion of Englishwomen was raised; he only stayed for a moment, however, not sorry for the opportunity of escaping, to indulge in his sad reflections about Espérance, and to revolve impossible schemes for releasing her.

'I feel as if I ought to know that young Frenchman,' said Lady Worthington, when Gaspard had left the room; 'yet I can't remember where I have seen him before.'

'His name is Gaspard de Mabillon, and he is a nephew of the Dean of Rilchester,' said Claude.

'Of Dean Collinson? De Mabillon? Oh! now I remember it all, his father married poor Amy Collinson. How terribly one forgets names; I must have seen this young man years and years ago, when he was a child, but of course it is the likeness to his father that I must have recognised. Is he in London, too?'

'No, he is dead—killed in the siege of Paris,' replied Claude. 'Little Mdlle. de Mabillon is living at the Deanery, and she told me all about it.'

'How shocking! I had no idea of that,' exclaimed Lady Worthington. 'We had so completely lost sight of them. He was a noble-minded man, and was most unjustly treated by Dean Collinson.'

'You knew him then personally?' asked Claude.

'Yes, slightly, that is. My mother was very fond of Amy Collinson, and about two years after her marriage we were travelling in France and spent a night with them, in their curious old, ruined castle. I was quite a girl then, and really had forgotten the name of the family. Poor things, it was a sad story altogether. What induced them to come to England?'

'I hardly know, but they seem to be very poor. I believe the Dean has adopted the little girl.'

'Indeed! I must go and see her when we go back to Worthington; the exodus is already beginning, the first instalment of nurses and children went off this morning, and I only meant now just to come in and wish you good-bye, but as usual I have been betrayed into gossipping!'

Lady Worthington was quite an old family friend of the Magnays, and since they had been left orphans, she had taken them specially under her protection. Claude owed a great deal to her; she was undoubtedly very fond of him, and after his sisters had gone to India, and he had been left to himself, she had spared no pains in helping him, constantly inviting him to her house, and what was better, really winning his confidence, and giving him almost a son's place in her affections.

Claude was by no means her only *protégé*, she was genuinely warm-hearted, and really wore herself out for other people, when she liked them. She had, however, strong dislikes as well, and when anyone was not in her good books, she allowed it to appear in her manner quite as much as good breeding would allow. This, added to her carelessness of appearances, was no doubt the reason why she was often not so much appreciated as she ought to have been.

Claude knew that the Collinsons were not particular

favourites of hers. Worthington Hall, Sir Henry's country house, was only two miles from Rilchester, and the families were of course acquainted; he was, however, not sure how far Lady Worthington cared for the intercourse, and began rather hesitatingly to ask what had long been in his mind.

'Have you time and inclination to add one other to your long list of *protégés?* Because, if so, little Mdlle. de Mabillon is the person of all others who is in need. She seems quite miserable at the Deanery.'

'Poor child!' said Lady Worthington, compassionately. 'It must indeed be a dreary house; tell me about her.'

'Perhaps this will tell you better than words,' said Claude, bringing forward his picture. 'Accidentally, her brother caught sight of that when he was here, and I wish you could have seen his face of grief and dismay! He says she used to be the brightest child imaginable.'

'And that is really her likeness? such a young face, and so utterly miserable! You have been exaggerating, Claude.'

'I am afraid not,' said Claude, smiling. 'But that you will see when you are at Rilchester. You do not think it a bad return for your kindness to me, that I bring you fresh "cases."'

Lady Worthington laughed.

'It is like the story of the man who cured a lame dog, which, as soon as it was well, ran away and brought its lame friend. I shall be only too glad, though, to help this little girl if I can, but the Deanery is a terribly unapproachable house. I wish I had known that young M. de Mabillon, he must have thought me inconsiderate not to recall his father's name. Where does he live?'

'In some wretched rooms at Pentonville,' answered Claude, wondering if Gaspard, also, were to be adopted.

'I think I will drive round that way, and just see him; he may have something to send to his sister, and I feel sure Sir Henry would wish it. Yes, I will certainly do so, he must be home by this time. Then good-bye for the present, Claude; you will let us hear from you, will you not? And remember that you must spend Christmas with us at Worthington, if you can, but don't refuse a better invitation.'

'Thank you, a thousand times,' replied Claude, gratefully. 'For me there could be no better.'

Lady Worthington looked anxiously at her watch as she drove away from St. John's Wood. It was very much out of her way to visit Gaspard de Mabillon, and her last day in town was, necessarily, a busy one, but now that the idea had once entered her head she would not give it up. Her coachman, therefore, received orders to drive fast to the address which Claude had given, and being accustomed to her ladyship's freaks did not even grumble, though a bad fog was coming on, and the horses were already far from fresh.

Arrived at the baker's shop, and having ascertained that M. de Mabillon was at home, Lady Worthington hastened in, and was shown upstairs by the astonished landlady, who was fairly dazzled by such an unexpected advent as a carriage and pair, and a lady in seal-skin and sables. She opened the sitting-room door, and announced the visitor with delighted pomposity. Lady Worthington had just time to see Gaspard standing by the mantel-piece, his face buried in his hands, before he hurriedly raised his head and came forward, doing the honours of his shabby little room with a grave courtesy which pleased his guest.

She began to explain her reasons for coming.

'I was so afraid you would think me rude. I did not

recall your name just now in Mr. Magnay's studio; neither my husband, nor I, had the least idea you were in London.'

'We came over in March, Madame,' said Gaspard.

'Ah! so long ago as that? I wish I had known before. Both Sir Henry and I knew your mother, as, perhaps, you have heard. I hope you had other friends in town, though, or you must have had a cold welcome to England.'

'We knew no one at first, Madame, but my sister went to Rilchester in the summer, to live with Dean Collinson, our uncle,' replied Gaspard.

'So Mr. Magnay was telling me, and I thought perhaps I might come to see you, so that I might take the last accounts of you to your sister. We live only two miles from Rilchester, and I must certainly go to see her.'

'A thousand thanks, Madame, you are very good, and Espérance will be very much pleased, I am sure.'

Lady Worthington was in too great a hurry to waste words; she went straight to her point.

'Now will you tell me candidly in what way you think I can be of any use to your sister? One might call for years at the Deanery, and never really learn to know a person.'

'Madame is very good. I think all that Espérance wants, is to be loved. She misses the home petting which she has always been used to.'

'Poor child! And that motherless household is the very worst she could have gone to. I will try to get at her, indeed. You must want her here sadly,' and Lady Worthington glanced round the bare, comfortless room, with its fireless grate, flaring gas-burner, and uncurtained window.

A shade crossed Gaspard's face, and he paused a minute before answering.

'I am glad she should be living in a comfortable house, at least. The separation is of course hard to bear, but I shall feel happier about her now that I know she will have your kindness, Madame.'

Lady Worthington was touched by his simple, unaffected way of speaking. She would gladly have seen more of him, but it was already so late that this was impossible. She rose reluctantly.

'This is a very short and unceremonious visit,' she said, holding out her hand to Gaspard, 'but I hope when we are in town again, in the spring, we shall learn to know you well, and, meantime, I can at least tell your sister I have seen you.'

Gaspard could only reiterate his thanks, and Lady Worthington, getting into her carriage, drove quickly home, trying to think of any means by which she might help the poor, proud, and apparently half-starved Frenchman.

CHAPTER XVII.

'I find no Spring, while Spring is well-nigh blown;
I find no nest, while nests are in the grove;
Woe's me for mine own heart that dwells alone,
My heart that breaketh for a little love.

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

IT was quite six o'clock before her ladyship's tired horses reached Kensington. She herself was cold and weary, but in spite of it there was an alertness in her step as she ascended the broad staircase which bespoke her indomitable energy. She opened the drawing-room door, and gave a relieved exclamation to find within only her younger sister, Frances Neville.

'I am home again, at last. I was so afraid you would have a whole room-full of visitors,' she exclaimed, drawing off her gloves and warming her hands by the fire.

'You have just escaped them,' said Frances, smiling. 'I have had six editions, and Colonel and Mrs. Vigar have only been gone a few minutes.'

'The unconscionable people to stay so late! Tiring you out, too, poor child. You look as white as a sheet. Is Henry in?'

'I fancy I heard his step outside, but I am not certain. Tell me where you have been, Katharine. You have had a long afternoon.'

'Yes, very. I will tell you all when I come down, but I must first speak to Henry if he is at home.' And Lady Worthington hastened away.

The two sisters were a strange contrast. Frances was many years the younger; she was now about eight-and-twenty, though her complexion of almost infantine fairness, and her abundance of pale golden hair, made her appear much less. She was evidently very delicate, her features were sharpened as if by constant suffering, and the mouth, though sweet, was still more expressive of firm endurance. Her eyes were like Lady Worthington's, clear grey—but while, with the elder sister, they were full of humorous brightness and good nature, with Frances they expressed patient happiness and a rarely-disturbed serenity.

Yet her life had been by no means an easy one. A tiny, sickly baby, she had lived and grown almost miraculously, struggling through illness after illness, and at length gaining some degree of health, though strength could never be hers. What was denied to her body, however, seemed to be added to her mind. Almost everyone who knew her, leant unconsciously upon her, for there

was in her that steadfast love of truth, and that earnest following after good, which only can engender real trust. This, added to a clear perception and ready sympathy, made her almost universally loved, and gave her greater influence than Lady Worthington, with all her kind deeds, could ever obtain. The two sisters, however, worked very well together, each recognising her own peculiar calling; Lady Worthington describing Frances Neville's as the 'ghostly' mission, and her own as the 'bodily.'

All this had not of course been attained without many struggles, nor was Frances ever entirely free from the difficulties and perplexed questionings which will always attack an active mind, particularly when bodily activity is at all restrained; but she had long ago learnt the secret of a happy life, and though her scrupulous exactness would not allow her to think even the most trifling thing immaterial, and laid down for her the most carefully drawn distinction between right and wrong, she was kept from narrowness—or rather necessarily widened by her high, indwelling motive.

Since her mother's death, which was several years before, Frances had lived with her sister—an arrangement which seemed to suit all parties. Lady Worthington liked having some one to nurse and tend, and Frances, though not an actual invalid, always needed great care. Her influence, too, in the house was exactly what was required. Her two romping nephews, Harry and Fred, and little 'tomboyish,' noisy Kathie, were quiet and gentle when 'Aunt Fanny' was in the room, and she seemed to have the power of drawing out all the good in them—the chivalrous love of the boys, and the womanly tenderness in her little niece.

When Lady Worthington left the room, something of the brightness faded, however, from Frances' face. She

was very tired, and as she lay on the sofa with throbbing head and wearied limbs, the oft-recurring question, which must have suggested itself to so many, began to trouble her.

What good came of those calls which she had received that day? Had not her afternoon been wasted? She had intended to do so much—to finish some of her work for the poor, to learn an accompaniment for Sir Henry, to go to afternoon church, and all had been frustrated by a weary succession of callers. What good had they done her?—what good could she have done them? she asked herself. Had not every one of her visitors probably regarded the call as a tiresome duty, and been only too thankful when their 'ten minutes' or 'quarter-of-an-hour' was over, and they were free to go? And what had they talked of?—The weather, the returns to town, the 'Tichborne' case, the latest marriages in high life, the music at some of the West-end churches, and the recent publications. Was this worth all that it had cost her?

She had only arrived at the conclusion that morning calls were necessary and right, but without having discovered any way for improving them, when her sister returned, followed by Sir Henry—a tall, handsome man, with iron-grey hair, a very powerful face, and the bearing of one accustomed to command, tempered by the most perfect courtesy.

Lady Worthington, distressed by her sister's pale, suffering face, hastened to arrange her cushions, tending her with an assiduity which might have been tiresome, had it not been done with such grace and with such loving anxiety.

'If I had only thought about it and come home sooner you would have been spared all this,' she said, with compunction. 'People seem to come back to town so much earlier than they used to do—I can't imagine why.'

There has been less travelling this year,' said Sir Henry; 'that may, perhaps, account for it. The state of France has frightened people.'

'Ah! your speaking of France reminds me—whom do you think I met this afternoon?—a son of that M. de Mabillon, who married Amy Collinson.'

'M. de Mabillon!' exclaimed Sir Henry, smiling; 'my some-time rival, whom I have been blessing ever since I——'

'Now, Henry!' interrupted Lady Worthington, colouring and smiling.

He answered by stooping to kiss her on the forehead, and there was a moment's silence, while Frances, understanding it all, could not resist watching her sister's beautiful and still wonderfully youthful face, softened as it was by love and happiness.

'You met M. de Mabillon, did you say?' asked Sir Henry, half abstractedly.

'No—his son,' answered Lady Worthington. 'He, poor man, was killed during the siege of Paris. Curiously enough, when I went to say good-bye to Claude Magnay this afternoon, I found young Gaspard de Mabillon at his studio, and half recognised him. Afterwards Claude told me who he was, and I went to see him myself at his rooms. It seems that he and his sister left France in the spring; she is now with the Collinsons, at Rilchester, and he trying for work here, but quite unsuccessfully.'

'And you, of course, adopted him at once, and said that I would find him employment,' said Sir Henry, smiling.

'No, not quite, I really was very prudent, my precipitation in the case of that young architect, the other day, has taught me wisdom. I made no rash promises; but

seriously, Henry, I do wish you could help the poor fellow in some way.'

'I will bear him in mind then, but you remember that I have had two of your *protégés* commended to my special attention, ever since June.'

'Julius Wright, you mean, and that young Mr. Frankland, I wish we could get them disposed of. Certainly all the professions are very much overstocked.'

'Why does not Dean Collinson help him?' asked Sir Henry.

'He has done so, in a manner, by taking the little girl to live with him, but I fancy from what the poor boy said this afternoon, that it went sorely against the grain to take help from that quarter. And that reminds me, Frances, we must really take the Deanery by storm as soon as we go home, and rescue little Mdlle. de Mabillon, who from Claude's account is very unhappy there.'

'A rescue during a morning call!' said Frances, laughing. 'I will go with you, if it is only for the pleasure of seeing your tactics, though I am afraid you will never baffle Mrs. Mortlake.'

'We shall see,' said Lady Worthington, with a smile of anticipated success.

The 'Season,' so to speak, of Rilchester, began when the Worthingtons returned. Everyone recognised Lady Worthington as the leader of the neighbourhood, and to a certain extent even the inhabitants of the Deanery bowed to her opinion.

Espérance had heard references to them all through the autumn:—'When the Worthingtons come back we must begin a series of dinners;' or, 'when Lady Worthington is here all the ladies' committees will come to life again;' or most frequently of all in justifying any questioned act, 'I am sure Lady Worthington does it.'

From such remarks as these, Espérance formed her own ideas, and being predisposed to think that nothing good could come out of Rilchester, she pictured Lady Worthington to herself as a tall, managing, masculine Englishwoman, and the more she heard her quoted the more she felt inclined to dislike her. The only thing which made her waver now and then, was the recollection of Claude Magnay's great regard for the whole family, but even this had little weight with her, so contradictory and cynical was she growing.

But while she was daily becoming more hopelessly miserable, relief was on its way to her, for Lady Worthington was not a person to lose time, and when once a project suggested itself to her she bent all her energies to its accomplishment.

It was 'All Souls' Day,' or as Espérance had always been accustomed to call it, the '*Jour des Morts*,' and between her sad memories and her uncongenial surroundings she was in a pitiable state.

A letter from Gaspard, full of tenderness, only proved a source of tears, and Mrs. Mortlake's unsympathetic curiosity, and Cornelia's undisguised scorn, were almost unbearable. Never had the purple drawing-room felt so oppressive, never had the day seemed so interminable! Something, however, of her old courage kept her from quite giving way; she sat reading aloud to her cousins, mechanically, indeed, but still with a firmness of purpose which deserved praise, considering her very slight powers of self-control.

Her thoughts were far away—now in the crowded Parisian cemetery, now in the hospital ward beside her father's death-bed, or further still in the little graveyard at Mabillon, where year by year she had taken on this day all the flowers which the wild, old

garden would produce. Did the peasants tend it now, she wondered.

'Really, Espérance, your pronunciation is getting worse and worse,' said Cornelia, reprovingly.

Whereupon Espérance was startled back to the present, and toiled along wearily with her reading, her eyes dim with tears.

At last the sound of the door-bell made itself heard. Any interruption would be welcome, and she listened eagerly for approaching footsteps. To her great relief the door was opened, and Lady Worthington and Miss Neville were announced.

Whether it was on account of this most opportune arrival, or whether Lady Worthington's appearance fascinated her, it is impossible to say, but her prejudices were forgotten, and for a minute or two she was as happy and animated as in former times. Lady Worthington was, at first, misled by the smile of pleasure with which she received her greeting. She followed out her preconceived plan, however, and exerted herself to the utmost to keep both Mrs. Mortlake and Cornelia 'at bay,' while Frances made the most of her opportunity with Espérance.

At first she was talkative enough—seemed delighted to speak of Gaspard and Claude Magnay, and fairly puzzled Frances by her apparent happiness. In a few minutes all was changed, however; a brass band, which had for some minutes been causing the grey walls of the Vicar's Court and the Deanery to echo to operatic airs, now gave forth with much martial ardour the all-inspiring '*Marseillaise*.'

The colour died out of Espérance's face. She paused in the middle of what she was saying, and Frances, full of pity for her, tried to invent some excuse for moving out of sight of the rest of the party.

'What beautiful chrysanthemums you have in your window, may I look at them?'

Espérance gladly assented, and the two moved to the opposite end of the room, where in the broad window-seat a few flowers were standing, now arranged by the perverse housemaid in stiff rows, though Espérance perseveringly tried to group them after her fancy.

The brass band was now still more audible, and Frances was more grieved than surprised, to see that the little French girl's eyes were brimming over with tears.

'It must be hard to hear one's national song in a strange land,' she said gently.

Espérance started, her cheeks glowed, and she even smiled through her tears, for Frances had spoken in her own language.

'You speak French like a native!' she exclaimed rapturously. 'Mademoiselle is too good—it makes the land no more strange. And yet,' she added, with a slight shiver, as '*Partant pour la Syrie*' succeeded the '*Marseillaise*,' 'I think it makes me only long the more. Mademoiselle will pardon me—but to-day—*le jour des morts*, I cannot help being sad, and no one here will understand, and—and—' with a rush of tears—'*Je suis desolée.*'

Frances was for a moment greatly perplexed. To attempt any comfort under the circumstances was almost impossible, yet to go to a still more retired place would probably attract Mrs. Mortlake or Cornelia. She resolved to risk it, however, and turned once more to Espérance, who was still standing disconsolately by the window, the great tears rolling down her cheeks, and dropping heavily on the chrysanthemum leaves.

'Do you think, dear, we might look at the conservatory? it would be quiet in there.'

Espérance caught at the idea, and led the way to a little

enclosed verandah which opened out of the drawing-room. Unfortunately, Cornelia happened to look up at the moment, and fearing that she had been neglecting Miss Neville, hastened forward.

'Will you not come nearer the fire? Espérance has not been taking care of you, I am afraid.'

'Oh, yes, indeed,' replied Frances, smiling. 'I have been admiring your chrysanthemums, and your cousin was going to show me the conservatory.'

'I am afraid it is scarcely worth seeing, our gardener has not managed well this autumn.'

Frances was afraid there would be no getting rid of Miss Collinson after this, but happily Lady Worthington managed a skilful appeal to her judgment in the question which she and Mrs. Mortlake were discussing, and Cornelia, nothing loth, left Frances and Espérance to admire the flowers alone.

Frances, hardly bestowing a glance on the shabby array of plants, took Espérance's hand in hers, and still speaking in French, said, 'Will you not tell me about your troubles? then, perhaps, I could understand a little. Claude Magnay told my sister that you were living here, and she came on purpose to see you; she knew your father and mother, as perhaps you have heard.'

'No, I think not,' replied Espérance, 'but I have heard papa speak of Sir Henry Worthington. He—he spoke of him once, I remember, before all the trouble began—so long ago it seems now.'

'Was that before you left the château?' asked Frances, convinced that talking was a relief.

'No, we were at Paris, papa and Gaspard, and Javotte and I; we were so happy, Mademoiselle, so very happy. But then came the war, and then the dreadful siege, and from then till now things have grown worse and worse.'

'Poor child!' said Frances, gently. Her words caused another rush of tears, however, for what memories did they not recall to Espérance! and how long it was since she had heard such a term of endearment! Frances could only hold her close, and Espérance, as she grew a little more calm, looked up gratefully, for nothing could have soothed her so well as the gentle, caressing sympathy, which Frances knew so well how to bestow.

Conscious that the time left to them was short, neither attempted to enter any more into detail, but Frances, anxious to show that this was to be the beginning of a closer intimacy, began to speak of the future.

'You will come and see me at home, will you not? and we will talk French all the time.'

'You are so kind, dear Mademoiselle,' said Espérance, 'now I shall have something to look forward to, and the time will pass more quickly.'

Her face lighted up for a moment, but there was a certain sadness in her words which did not escape Frances; it seemed to her unnatural for such a mere child to speak thus of whiling away the time. Yet, as they entered the oppressive drawing-room once more, she owned that it was not surprising; an air of stiff, sleepy propriety, pervaded the room, the large clock on the mantel-piece seemed to tick slower than other clocks, the sunlight struggled almost reluctantly through the narrow windows, the fire smouldered lazily in the grate, a fat pug-dog yawned continually on the hearth-rug; she could quite understand that all this would depress a French nature.

And Espérance certainly was out of place amid these surroundings. She hastened to move one of the ponderous arm-chairs for Frances—it is to be feared that she took a wicked delight in changing their positions—and then, as Cornelia turned to the younger visitor, she bent down to

the dog, closed his mouth in the middle of a yawn, and tried to rouse him a little.

Something in her unstudied attitude annoyed Cornelia, she wished she would sit down and be like an English girl.

'Do leave the dog alone,' she said at last, with some sharpness in her tone.

Espérance looked round, surprised, but still smiling.

'It is his exercise. *Ciel!* he sleeps again when my back is turned! Pug, you are the most lazy of dogs.'

The provoking ease of manner, the unfortunate '*Ciel*,' equivalent to swearing at the Deanery, and yet more, the grammatical mistake, angered Cornelia beyond all patience, and in an unmistakably displeased voice she said, 'There are plenty of chairs, Espérance, why do you not sit down?'

That 'English' idea of the necessity of sitting down! how it annoyed Espérance! With a little expressive movement of her hands, she subsided, however, into the nearest vacant chair, and sat for a few minutes like patience on a monument, but when the good-byes were being said Frances noticed that her eyes were full of tears, which she was sure would not have been the case had Pug's diverting exercise been continued. The departure of the guests made an opportunity of escape, of which Espérance was not slow to avail herself, particularly as she felt that a scolding was in store; but in all her hurry she found time to stop at the landing window till Miss Neville's violet bonnet was hidden by the archway of the Vicar's Court. The stratagem had certainly been successful.

Lady Worthington gave a sigh of relief as the carriage drove away from the Deanery.

'There! I call that "Something attempted, something done!" and if you don't tell me of a grand result, Frances, with Claude's "Mariana," I shall feel ill used!'

'Your manœuvring was beautiful to see,' said Frances, laughing. 'How you managed to keep both Mrs. Mortlake and Miss Collinson occupied, I can't imagine.'

'Merely by chatter. General talk when possible—gossip, if Mrs. Mortlake seemed to be slipping away—the arts and sciences to detain Cornelia—what a medley it must have been, to be sure! But tell me about my *protégée*. Poor little maid! I was longing to talk to her.'

'I wish you could have done so, her *naïvété* would have delighted you. Poor little thing! half-a-dozen words of French won her completely. She was crying, clinging, pouring out her troubles, all in five minutes, as if we had known each other for years.'

'Or as if she had not had a confidante for months,' said Lady Worthington. 'No wonder she is unhappy in that gloomy place, and with those terribly stiff people.'

'And yet I fancy there is so much real good in Miss Collinson,' said Frances, musingly.

'My dear Frances, you would see goodness in every living soul, I do believe. However, you are doubtless right, only you really must let me try and rescue that little French girl, who I feel convinced is as blind as I am to her cousins' virtues.'

'To rescue her, or to make her see?' said Frances, half to herself. 'I wonder which is the right way.'

'As usual in our case, my dear, a little of both, I suppose,' said Lady Worthington; after which the conversation turned upon other things.

CHAPTER XVIII.

'"O dreary life," we cry, "O dreary life!"
And still the generations of the birds
Sing through our sighing, and the flocks and herds
Serenely live, while we are keeping strife
With Heaven's true purpose on us, as a knife
Against which we may struggle, . . .
. . . . O Thou God of old!
Grant me some smaller grace than comes to these,
But so much patience as a blade of grass
Grows by, contented through heat and cold.'

E. B. BROWNING.

'GRANNIE is coming back to Rilchester,' observed Cornelia Collinson, looking up from a letter she was reading at breakfast the following morning.

'Coming back!' exclaimed Bertha, in her annoyed voice. 'I thought she was to spend the winter at St. Leonards. I am sure she said in the summer that she had taken the house for a year.'

'She seems to wish to be at home again, and as to the house, there was little difficulty in disposing of that. She will return early next week.'

'And now there will be those wearisome pilgrimages down to the Priory,' groaned Mrs. Mortlake. 'How tiresome of her to change her mind!'

'Where is the Priory?' asked Espérance, not a little excited at the prospect of a new arrival, and rightly conjecturing that 'Grannie' was Mrs. Passmore.

'The Priory—my grandmother's house—is about two miles out of the town, on the London road,' explained Cornelia, after a moment's pause.

Espérance was sorry that it lay in an opposite direction to Worthington Hall. She did not make any more

inquiries, however, as her cousins were evidently put out, but her curiosity grew all the greater, and she looked forward much to the first of the 'pilgrimages,' which Mrs. Mortlake had mentioned.

Mrs. Passmore arrived at Rilchester on Tuesday, and on the Wednesday Mrs. Mortlake insisted that some one must go to see her. This led to a disagreeable discussion between the sisters as to who should perform the tiresome duty, to which Espérance listened with some scorn and a good deal of amusement, congratulating herself that for once she was out of it.

After much arguing, Cornelia yielded, not very graciously, and consented to go to the Priory, provided she could have the carriage.

'And you may as well come with me,' she added, turning to Espérance; 'it will be useful for you to know the way to the Priory.'

Espérance prudently refrained from expressing too much satisfaction, aware that any 'foolishness' on her part would put a stop to the whole thing; but inwardly she was much excited. To meet Mrs. Passmore, her mother's friend and helper, was indeed an unlooked for pleasure, and Cornelia would certainly have been scornfully surprised had she known that Espérance spent a good half-hour in curling her feather, preparing her dainty little necktie, and mending her old, but faultlessly neat gloves, in view of the afternoon's expedition.

By three o'clock the cousins were driving through the sleepy streets of Rilchester, Cornelia feeling virtuous though inclined to be cross, and Espérance almost gay, in spite of a thick November fog, which usually depressed her more than anything. Almost for the first time she saw the really poor quarter of the city, the deserted, tumble-down houses, and the squalid, dirty little children.

'This is different from the rest of Rilchester,' she exclaimed. 'Is this where cousin Christabel goes to see her poor people?'

'Oh, no, she merely visits a few of the respectable houses near us,' replied Cornelia, shortly.

'But who takes care of all this poor part?'

'I'm sure I don't know, it is not in our parish.'

The parish belonging to the Cathedral merely included the houses in the Close, and a very small sprinkling of 'respectable poor,' an arrangement singularly unfortunate, since it gave all the rich people the same excuse for ignorance and idleness which Cornelia had just made—'It is not in our parish'—while the clergy of the poorer districts were sadly hampered by the dearth of church-workers.

Espérance asked no more questions, and in a few minutes the houses were left behind, and the bare, bleak, country lay before them. Half-a-mile beyond the town stood the Priory, a gloomy, brown building, not really old, but built in the antique style; Espérance's heart beat quickly, when, in one of the lancet-headed windows, she caught sight of the snowy hair and widow's cap which could belong to no one but Mrs. Passmore.

The cap, however, speedily disappeared, and by the time the carriage had driven up the gravel sweep, the old lady was standing by the open door, with what Espérance considered quite the right kind of welcome.

'How good of you to come the very first day, my dear children, in all this fog, too.'

'My dear grannie, do go in, how unwise to come out to the door,' said Cornelia.

Whereupon the old lady, but half understanding, held out her hand to Espérance, till Cornelia herself led the way to the prim little drawing-room, and taking up Mrs.

Passmore's speaking-trumpet, made the deaf old lady understand who her companion was.

'Amy's little girl come from France! dear me, dear me! come and kiss me, my dear.'

Espérance obeyed willingly enough, but when Cornelia put the other end of the speaking-trumpet into her hand with an injunction to 'say something,' every word of English suddenly escaped her memory, and after a dreadful pause she could only say in French, 'I am so pleased to see the friend of my mother.'

Whereupon Cornelia frowned angrily, and the old lady herself put down the trumpet with a little laugh.

'Ah! you speak in French, and I am not such a good scholar in that respect as I used to be; never mind, never mind, we shall understand each other soon.'

Espérance blushed crimson, vexed at her failure, and some minutes passed before she had collected her thoughts enough to listen to the conversation.

'Yes, I grew tired of St. Leonards,' Mrs. Passmore was saying. 'The house was draughty, too, and I began to long for my old haunts; after all, my dear, there is no place like home.'

'And are you comfortably settled in?' asked Cornelia.

'Well, pretty well, there is a great deal to see to, and the days are short; my rheumatism has been troublesome to-day, and that is a hindrance. Could you spend a few days with me, my dear, you or Bertha? I should be so glad to have you.'

Cornelia did not at all wish to stay, and began to hunt for excuses.

'I am so busy just now, grannie, or I certainly would come, and Bertha has—a cold, or she might have helped you.'

Mrs. Passmore looked disappointed.

'I am sorry for that, it would have been such a pleasure to have you.' Then, with a smile again, 'Could Amy's little girl stay?'

'Oh, certainly,' said Cornelia, without referring to Espérance. 'She shall stay with you now, just as long as you like.'

And so the matter was settled, and Cornelia soon took leave, turning just at the last to Espérance with the words, 'I will send down your things, and the books you will want, and you must walk in on Friday morning for your lessons, I will be ready for you at eleven.'

Then the carriage drove off, and Espérance was left behind with mingled feelings of relief at being away from the Deanery, anger at being so summarily disposed of, and awe of Mrs. Passmore and the trumpet.

She was soon happy enough, however, for Mrs. Passmore was delighted to have a companion, and spared no pains to make her comfortable and at home. She was charmed with her curious old-fashioned bedroom, and with the exquisite neatness of the whole house; there was a feeling of calmness and repose, too, which, with all its dulness, the Deanery never could attain, and most of all, the sense of being really wanted restored Espérance to much of her old cheerful brightness.

The only drawback to her complete happiness was Mrs. Passmore's deafness; this had now been of such long duration that the old lady had fallen into silent habits, and only twice in the long winter evenings did she take up her trumpet. But though silence or dulness of any description were usually very uncongenial to Espérance, she was now too much out of health, and too weary of the incessant 'nagging' of her cousins, not to be thankful for the respite.

The busy idleness of the next morning, too, suited her admirably. She enjoyed helping old Mrs. Passmore in her manifold tidyings and arrangings; and as the old lady could not feel comfortable till every drawer and cupboard in the house had been systematically searched and sorted, she was kept fully occupied. Her dainty little fingers seemed to have a natural aptitude for such work, and nothing came amiss to them, whether they dealt with stores of old lace, artificial flowers, venerable silk dresses, or chaotic odds and ends.

At last, while setting to rights the contents of an old secretary, she came across a drawer full of letters, and, not liking to break in upon their wild confusion, drew Mrs. Passmore's attention to them.

'Letters! dear me!' exclaimed the old lady; 'I thought I had sorted them all last year. This will be an afternoon's work for us, Espérance.'

Accordingly, after the two o'clock dinner was over, and Mrs. Passmore had taken her usual *siesta*, the two set to work, destroying a few of the less precious documents, and arranging the others carefully according to their dates.

Espérance had just tied up and labelled a packet of 1847 letters, when Mrs. Passmore gave an exclamation of surprise.

'How strange to be sure! and that I should have come across them to-day! Two of poor Amy's letters—your mother, my dear.' And she handed them to Espérance.

They were folded together, though one was written on thin, blue paper, the other on a little note-sized sheet, yellow with age. Espérance opened the latter and read eagerly:—

'*Russell Square, 16th May,* 1848.

'My dear Mrs. Passmore,—I cannot thank you enough for your great kindness in asking me to stay with you during next month. Thank you, too, for your consideration in saying that, if my brother changes his mind, I may still be free to stay in London; but of this I now feel sure there is no hope, for, besides his former objection to our marriage, he has now, I fear, a personal dislike to M. de Mabillon. I cannot tell you how terribly all this has grieved me. Had it not been for dear Christabel's kindness, I don't think I could have borne it. She has, indeed, been a good sister to me.

'Under the circumstances, both Alphonse and I think it will be best that our wedding should be perfectly quiet; so, with many thanks, I will decline your kind offer of accommodation for any guests. If it will be quite convenient to you, and to the clergyman of the parish, we should prefer some day in the first week of June, and should like it to be early in the morning.

'Again thanking you for your great kindness,

'Believe me, your affectionate,

'Amy Collinson.'

'Christabel, then, was the name of my aunt?' asked Espérance, looking up with swimming eyes.

Seeing how great an interest her companion took in the matter, Mrs. Passmore became at once both sympathetic and communicative.

'Poor child! Yes, indeed, it was a sad story from first to last. My daughter Christabel was devoted to your mother; and though, of course, she could not do much to promote the marriage in direct opposition to your uncle, yet she always gave Amy her sympathy, and herself

begged me to help her. Poor young thing, she was sad enough all the time she stayed with me. On the very morning of the wedding I remember she received a final letter of remonstrance from Dean Collinson, and was terribly upset by it. And then came the service in church, which seemed to give her new strength, for her face, which had been so troubled, grew quiet and serene; and I remember thinking what a handsome couple they were, and wishing that the Dean could have been there to hear your father's earnest, heartfelt vows, though perhaps his foreign English might only have annoyed him. I heard from her two or three times after that, and then your father wrote to tell me of her death when you were born; but we shall not find that letter, for I believe it was sent on to the Dean.'

The conversation was interrupted by the servant bringing in the tea things, and Espérance, having asked leave to keep the two letters, put them away for a private reading. In the evening, when Mrs. Passmore had fallen asleep in her arm-chair, she took them out again, and eagerly though reverently opened the foreign one. It was written from the Château, and dated in June 1854. Much of it was incomprehensible to Espérance, being in answer to a letter of Mrs. Passmore's, and full of references to English matters, but on the third page she caught sight of familiar names, which made her heart beat quickly. She read on still more eagerly:—

'And now I must tell you about my dear little boy, Gaspard. How I wish I could show him to you. He is five years old, the very image of his father, and so tall and strong for his age. He is always with me, for our good *bonne* Javotte, though she is quite devoted to him, has plenty to do, and I would not have him away from me for the world. My husband tells me, too, that our "nursery" does not exist in France, the children are almost

always with their mothers. The only thing I have to wish for now is a little daughter; it would be so good for Gaspard, and he is so loving that I am sure he would make a good little protector! You ask if I am any stronger than I was last year, and I hardly know what to say. In some ways I think not, but I think I have learnt at last to be less fretful and impatient, with regard to James's continued displeasure. Still I cannot help longing to hear from him. If he could only know what Alphonse really is! But you must not think that I am grieving unduly over this. I feel how wrong it was to do so the first two or three years, and now I cannot help hoping that in some way all will come right at last, if not in our time, at least to our child.'

Espérance read the last sentence over many times. Was her mother's hope coming true? Was all that now seemed so hard to bear really helping its fulfilment? Certainly it was true that Dean Collinson had taken her into his own house, that he had treated her kindly, that she owed almost everything to him; but then, had not Gaspard humiliated himself to actual begging for assistance first, and did not her uncle still detest the very name of De Mabillon? No; there was still much to be done before all could be 'right at last.' But from that evening Espérance began to think seriously of the duty of reconciliation, which, certainly in some degree, rested with her. How, in her peculiar position, she could effect any good she did not at present see; but she was hopeful, and her mother's wish was a strong incentive.

Meanwhile, at the Deanery, matters were not going very smoothly. Cornelia's quiet disposal of Espérance at the Priory had pleased no one, the Dean even had for once objected to his favourite daughter's proceedings.

'Out of respect to your grandmother, my dear, either you or Bertha should have remained; to leave your cousin, a mere child and a perfect stranger, was really a mistake.'

'Grannie will never understand Espérance, with that ridiculous accent, which I am sure is all affectation,' observed Mrs. Mortlake. 'Besides, it is awkward to be without her here, there is no one to see to Bella when she is downstairs.'

'Christabel wants to turn me into the nursery-maid,' said Bertha, laughing; 'but neither Bella nor I approve.'

'I don't know what you mean,' said Mrs. Mortlake, with an offended air. 'Espérance has no idea of managing the child, she merely does what I tell her.'

'That is to say, she is your "white slave;" of course you miss her.'

'Oh, if you use slang expressions we will drop the argument at once, please,' said Mrs. Mortlake, feeling that she was being worsted, and leaving the room after one final thrust—'Your old fault of laziness is coming out more strongly than ever; you can neither do things yourself, nor see others do them.'

Whereupon the door was closed sharply, while the Dean looked surprised, Cornelia annoyed, and Bertha sublimely indifferent.

'I do not understand it,' said the Dean, half nervously. 'It seems to me a great pity that Bertha does not go more to the Priory. However, you must settle it among yourselves, my dears, only pray have no more disputings.' And then, having delivered his conscience to his family, the Dean left matters terrestrial to their own course, and became engrossed with a disquisition on the 'Moons of Jupiter.'

At eleven o'clock on Friday, Espérance walked in from

the Priory carrying her Latin primer, Wittich's German tales, and a book on physical geography. To tell the truth, she had scarcely opened them for the last two days, and, though anxious to make up for lost time, she walked into Rilchester to the tune of '*di-es, di-es, di-em*,' &c., her thoughts were generally so far away that the fifth declension did not make much impression on her memory.

The walk took rather longer than she had anticipated, and, conscious of unpunctuality, she 'tolled' the front-door bell with some apprehension. The door was opened more quickly than usual, but Espérance's quick eye detected the surly, ill-used expression on the face of the footman, and was certain that Mrs. Mortlake was in one of her fault-finding humours; these invariably affected the temper of the whole household, and more especially of the servants.

She opened the dining-room door with still greater anxiety, and found Mrs. Mortlake and Bertha hard at work, writing essays for the 'True Blue Society,' a particular hobby of Mrs. Mortlake's. Her essay was generally put off till the latest possible day, and then became a household nuisance, so that Espérance had learnt to dread the sight of blue foolscap, and to connect it with incessant scoldings and general misery. Bertha had unwillingly been induced to join the Society, and she, too, was writing for dear life, with a pucker in her forehead and a bored expression.

'Don't speak, we are so busy, said Mrs. Mortlake, barely looking up; 'and what you've done with the quill pens I can't imagine, Cornelia declares you had them last.'

'I don't remember having them,' said Espérance, thinking of various scoldings for writing with a pin-like pen.

'Of course not, you never do remember anything that is not convenient to you,' said Mrs. Mortlake, sharply.

Espérance began to open the drawers of a cabinet rather hopelessly, and, after a few minutes' search, found the missing pens among Bella's toys. She put them down beside her cousin without speaking, and was moving away, when Mrs. Mortlake pushed them from her again, saying, in her quietly disagreeable voice, 'Oh, it's no use now; how can I change my pen in the middle of this? Couldn't your common sense tell you that?'

Espérance shrugged her shoulders, and took back the pen-box; but her common sense did tell her it would be best to leave the room quickly, and, without another word, she ran away.

It was certainly a cheerless welcome for her, poor child. Already the quiet serenity which she had gained at the Priory had changed to the 'Mariana' expression, and it was with a heavy heart that she entered Cornelia's sanctum with her burden of untouched lesson-books.

'Good-morning, Espérance. Why are you so late?'

'I am very sorry, but I scarcely allowed the time necessary for a so long walk,' said Espérance, who invariably spoke bad English when dispirited.

'Don't let it happen again, then, and let us lose no time now—your Latin first.'

With one last despairing glance Espérance dashed off with her fifth declension, stumbling terribly. Cornelia put down the book gravely.

'It is no use doing things by halves; you had better stay here and learn it, though I should have thought at your age supervision was unnecessary.'

'Your age' was always being cast in Espérance's teeth, but it was as convenience suited—either 'a mere

child of your age,' or 'a great girl of your age,' as in the present instance. She began to wish to be either one thing or the other.

The 'physical geography' was rather more successful; but, alas! the German translation came utterly to grief. The very sound of the language was distasteful to Espérance, and, under the circumstances, Cornelia would have been much wiser not to have attempted it; but to her mind no one was properly educated who could not read and speak German, and she persevered in spite of Espérance's wishes to the contrary. It really was a hardship to be set to learn, '*Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?*' and, after laboriously translating it first into French in her brain, and then into English with her tongue, Espérance could not resist saying, 'Well, I think the Germans are the most conceited people I ever heard of, boasting about all the divisions of their country so as to fill two pages!'

'It has been pretty clearly shown lately that the Germans are not vain boasters,' said Cornelia, severely. 'Moreover, "people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." Conceit is the proverbial character of a certain other European nation.'

'You may as well say it quite!' said Espérance, with flashing eyes. 'I know what you mean—now that France is fallen you will all trample on her! and that is what you call English generosity! *Ciel!* if you speak of proverbial characters, it is fair that I may quote the English one—"insular pride and ill-manners," and it is true—true!'

Cornelia was secretly rather amused at the storm of patriotism which she had evoked, but she answered gravely, and in her repressive voice, 'When you have quite done we will go on, please. Conjugate the verb "*Haben*," to have.'

The words seemed almost like an insult. This cold dignity of Cornelia's exasperated Espérance more than anything; moreover, to have her patriotism utterly ignored was more unbearable than the severest scolding, and in the worst possible humour she repeated the verb, taking no pains to pronounce the h's.

She left Cornelia's room much more unhappy than before, and conscious that her outbreak had been both childish and useless. Out of heart with herself and with all around her, yet unable to find the remedy, she grew more and more miserable, and longed, with a sick longing, for relief in any form—a letter from Gaspard, a sight of Frances Neville, or even a ray of sunshine. But nothing came, the postman brought no letter, Frances did not come into Rilchester—even the sun did not once pierce the gloom of that murky November day.

Mrs. Mortlake never spoke except to complain, Bertha after her unusual effort was more taciturn than ever, Cornelia was stiff and displeased, and Espérance was cross. Not that she would have allowed this to herself, even; she felt, and in some degree was, illused, but in fact the long strain of the past year had so completely worn her out, that mind and body alike were unequal to the least harass, and trifling annoyances, which in good health she would have laughed at, now seemed the deepest grievances. And so she sat wearily through the afternoon with her book before her, wishing herself and 'The German Fatherland' at the bottom of the sea, while no one would take the trouble to put her into the right way, or to say the few words of love and sympathy which she so sorely needed.

'You had better get ready to go back,' said Cornelia, as the clock struck half-past four. 'It is getting dusk, and you will be alone.'

Alone! It was a shock indeed to Espérance's ideas of propriety. To have walked in in broad daylight was perhaps permissible in England, though she would never have been allowed to do such a thing in France, even at Mabillon—but to walk through the town, and along a deserted country road, with the darkness fast coming on, was too much—she felt sure that even in England this could not be *comme il faut.*

No escort was offered, however, so she saw no help for it, and unwillingly—for once—closed the door of the Deanery behind her, and went out into the autumn twilight. At first the novelty rather pleased her, but when she had passed the Vicar's Court, and the Close, a strange, eerie, unprotected feeling mastered her, and she shivered at the thought of the long way to come. The bright lights in the windows looked tempting and home-like, she fancied she could have been happy in every one of the houses she passed, forgetful that red curtains, warm firelight, and bright picture frames, existed also at the Deanery. And then she thought of the hero of 'Excelsior,' when

> 'In happy homes he saw the light
> Of household fires gleam warm and bright,'

and wondered if he felt as lonely and desolate as she did; but then he was bound on a great enterprise, and she had only to live on quietly in an uncongenial home, unless, indeed, her enterprise were to be the fulfilment of her mother's wish. If so, how sadly forgetful of it she had been that day! What harm had she done to her cause!

Great tears welled up into her eyes as she thought of this; perhaps she was partly blinded by them, or perhaps her little black figure was not very noticeable in the gathering darkness, for she came violently into collision with a gang of labourers returning from their day's work,

and all her books were strewn on the pavement. For a moment she was horribly frightened, for they were rough-looking men, and their voices and unintelligible dialect sounded alarming to her unaccustomed ears.

'Now then, Bill, you pick up them there books—knockin' up agin young leddies in that way!' this in very uncouth English.

The rest of the men moved on, while Bill, thus addressed, stooped to pick up the books.

'I'm sure I ask pardon, miss,' he began, rubbing each book on his grimy jacket by way of taking off the mud.

'Thank you, it does not matter,' began Espérance in French, then correcting herself, 'there is no harm done, thank you.'

'Be you from France, miss?' asked the man.

'Yes,' replied Espérance, with a momentary terror that some impertinence was intended, 'yes, I am French.'

'Only asked, miss, because as how my missus is from them parts, and talks like what you did. Good-evening to you, miss, and I ask your pardon.'

He passed on, and Espérance went on her way, amused by the incident, which, trifling though it was, served to turn away her thoughts from her grievances. Certainly her first encounter with a British labourer had been a happy one; if all were so polite she need not fear to walk about alone, but then this particular one had been blessed with a French wife, which no doubt accounted for his good manners. Before long she ceased to dread the lonely walks to the Priory, and to look forward to the gang of labourers, and specially to 'Bill's' invariable salute, as a kind of protection.

CHAPTER XIX.

'There lies no desert in the land of life,
For e'en that tract that barrenest doth seem,
Laboured of thee in faith and hope, shall teem
With heavenly harvests and rich gatherings rife.'

F. A. KEMBLE.

DINNER parties at the Deanery were usually very dreary affairs. Dean Collinson was not at all a sociable man, and grudged an evening spent away from his beloved observatory. Cornelia and Bertha had an equal distaste to society, and had it not been for Mrs. Mortlake, and the absolute necessity of showing some hospitality to their neighbours, the dinner parties would have been willingly dispensed with. And not only were the hosts thus minded, but every one who had been a guest on previous occasions groaned on receiving a fresh invitation. Certainly the Deanery was the least popular house in Rilchester, and it was thus that Espérance obtained her very unfavourable impressions of English society.

After spending a fortnight at the Priory, she had returned sorrowfully enough to her uncle's house, nor were her spirits raised when she heard that in the evening that dreary English institution, a large dinner party, was to take place. In the afternoon, however, Bertha happened to mention that Sir Henry and Lady Worthington were coming, whereupon Espérance became greatly excited.

'Coming this evening? Oh! I am so glad, and does Miss Neville come too?'

'No, she is not well enough, I believe she was asked. But what makes you rave so about the Worthingtons?'

'Lady Worthington was so kind to me, and I admire her more than I can tell you.'

'You had better be careful, or Christabel will call you a toady.'

'How?' asked Espérance, wonderingly.

'Oh, really, I can't teach you English—Cornelia will explain it to you.'

Espérance was not very fond of Cornelia's explanations, so she resorted to dictionaries, where 'Toad—*crapaud;*' 'toad-eater—*adulateur-trice, parasite,*' gave her some idea of Bertha's meaning.

She sighed over the difficulty of the terrible English language, but found some comfort in a bulky Webster, in which 'toady' was stigmatised as 'colloquial and vulgar.'

Lady Worthington came rather less reluctantly than usual to the Deanery, for she had special designs on Espérance, and her successful manœuvring on the former occasion had given her confidence. When the ladies returned to the drawing-room after dinner, she lost no time in seeking her *protégée,* whom she found trying hard to make conversation between two young ladies who were very stiff and monosyllabic.

Espérance, delighted at any interruption, received Lady Worthington's cordial greeting with a radiant face, and inquired after Frances Neville, her quaint, demure manner a little belied by the eagerness of her expression.

'She has been poorly all this week,' said Lady Worthington. 'But she is much better to-day; she asked me to tell you that she has been looking up her French, and is very eager to have a good talk with you. Will you come and see her some day?'

'Thank you a thousand times, it would be such a pleasure,' said Espérance, delightedly.

Just then Mrs. Mortlake came to take possession of the chair next to Lady Worthington, and Espérance would have moved away, but Lady Worthington, taking hold of her hand, detained her.

'I was just telling Espérance how much Frances wants to see her, it is the delight of her life to have some one to talk French to.'

'Yes, I knew Miss Neville's sympathies were all with the French; I remember what arguments we used to have, during the Franco-Prussian war,' said Mrs. Mortlake.

Lady Worthington felt a quick movement in the hand she was holding, and hastily turned from the subject.

'Now, when Frances gave me her message, a scheme came into my head by which I shall come in for a share of the enjoyment; will you not come over some day next week, Mrs. Mortlake, bringing Espérance with you, then she and Frances can have their talk together, and you and I shall be secure of a *tête-à-tête*.'

Mrs. Mortlake was flattered, and gave a ready consent. An afternoon was fixed, and Espérance, as she went away to do her duty towards the two young ladies, felt that any amount of dulness could be endured with such a pleasure in prospect.

Lady Worthington, too, was satisfied with her success, and late as it was on her return could not resist going to her sister's room to tell her of it.

She found her already in bed, and with some compunction for disturbing her would have gone away again.

'Don't go,' said Frances, appealingly. 'I'm not the least sleepy—my neuralgia is raging. Tell me about your party.'

'Oh, a very dull affair indeed—a regular Dean and Chapter dinner, with a great array of canons and canon-

esses. Henry looked quite worldly in his dress clothes among the sombre clerics.'

'How was Espérance?'

'She looked much better. Certainly that French animation is very charming—Henry was immensely taken with her, and insists that she was better dressed than any one in the room, and though there was nothing more than white muslin, and a dainty arrangement of ivy sprays, I really think that he is right.'

'The art of dressing is born in Frenchwomen, certainly. But when is she coming here?'

'Next Tuesday afternoon, and Mrs. Mortlake, too; and Henry talks of getting up fireworks for the children that night, so that we may persuade her to stay. Our triumph will be complete.'

'Of course, now that you have taken an M.P. into your counsels,' said Frances, laughing.

Tuesday afternoon was as fine as could be wished; the sun, which for some days had scarcely penetrated the fog, shone brightly, and the air was deliciously clear and frosty. Espérance could not conceal her happiness, and indulged in a rhapsody which did not fail to attract Mrs. Mortlake's disapproval.

'What a perfect day, Christabel! we could not have had a better, could we? Just look at the sky! I do believe we have had the last of those dreadful fogs. How good it was of Lady Worthington to invite us! Is she not the most kind-hearted of people?'

'Yes, certainly, Lady Worthington is good-natured; but, my dear Espérance, please do not take to running after people with handles to their names—nothing is so vulgar.'

'I do not understand you,' said Espérance, puzzled by the idiom, but colouring crimson at the last word.

'I mean that nothing shows such bad taste as any eagerness to become familiar with those in a higher station than yourself; nothing is so contemptible as a hankering after nobility.'

Espérance blushed still more deeply, but there was a dangerous light in her eyes as she answered, 'Thank you for warning me, Christabel, but in the present instance it was unnecessary; we, too, are of the *noblesse*.'

Mrs. Mortlake looked blankly astonished for a moment; then, seeing that she had been worsted, took refuge in silence.

Espérance, feeling triumphant and naughty, looked at the flat landscape from the carriage-window, and pretended to be enjoying herself very much, though in reality she was not quite happy, conscious that her retort had not been in good taste, and sure that her father would have disapproved of the little piece of ostentation.

It was a relief when they reached Worthington, passed the green gates and unpretentious lodge, and drove through the pleasant, well-timbered park.

'How beautiful it is!' said Espérance, breaking the silence rather rashly, as she glanced at the sunny slopes.

'A very poor approach,' said Mrs. Mortlake, 'they might have made it at least half-a-mile longer by a little arrangement.'

After this nothing more was said, and Espérance gave a sigh of relief when the carriage drew up before the large, plain, substantial house, more comfortable within than artistic without.

In the drawing-room they found Lady Worthington and her little girl. Espérance looked eagerly for Frances Neville, but she was not there.

'Frances has such bad neuralgia to-day,' explained Lady Worthington, as soon as the greetings were over; 'I wonder whether you would mind going up to her little

sitting-room, Espérance, it is the only warm room in the house, and she is rather afraid to leave it.'

This was a delightful arrangement, and Espérance gave a glad consent, while little Kathie, at a word from her mother, ran on before her to show the way.

Frances' sitting-room was the most cozy of retreats; the bay window facing south was filled with ferns and broad-leaved plants, the fire seemed to throw out more heat than ordinary fires, miniature easy chairs stood exactly where they were wanted, and books and pictures filled every available space on the walls. Frances herself was lying on a couch drawn close to the fire, looking very white and exhausted. She did not get up when Espérance came in.

'I shall not treat you as a visitor,' she said in French, looking up with her peculiarly winning smile. 'This is quite an unceremonious visit, I consider. Kathie dear, bring Espérance the little Spanish chair, will you?'

Then after the double kiss—a little consideration of her nationality which was greatly appreciated—Espérance found herself comfortably installed beside Frances.

'Is your head no better?' she asked, half timidly, for Frances really looked very ill.

'Well, it is bad just now, but you will talk and make me forget it.'

The womanly instinct was strong in Espérance, and in a second her dainty little gloves were off, and she was stroking Frances' burning forehead with that soothing, half-mesmeric touch in her cool finger tips which seems the only remedy for neuralgia.

'Where did you learn this delicious spell?' asked Frances, 'it makes the pain almost a luxury.'

Espérance laughed a little.

'I don't think there is anything to learn. I did it

once or twice to Sœur Angélique when she was ill, and she used to like it.'

'Who is Sœur Angélique?'

'One of the sisters in the convent at home; she used to teach me, and I loved her dearly. I think you must be a little like her, for I always think of her when I see you.'

'Tell me about her—what was she like?'

'She was dark and pale, and her eyes were brown and always shining. No, she cannot really have been like you, but she had a look on her face as if she were always thinking of holy things. It must be in that you remind me of her.'

Frances coloured a little.

'And were the other sisters like her?'

'No, Sœur Thérèse was very cross, at least I thought so then. She always talked of discipline—discipline, while Sœur Angélique never talked at all like that, but only loved. It seems so long since I had those afternoons at the convent school. Sometimes I feel as if it had been another Espérance, of whom I had read—not myself at all.'

'You have had such changes.'

'Ah, yes, and things that used to seem troubles in the old times look so little now. I would bear them so well if only they would come again instead of——'

'Instead of present troubles?' asked Frances, gently.

But Espérance's hand ceased to caress her forehead, and she was not surprised at a sudden half-passionate outburst.

'I do so *hate* England! If only—if only, I were at home again!'

'Poor little one,' said Frances, drawing her nearer, 'it must be very lonely and sad for you, but you know it must be best, or you would not be here.'

'I don't believe it, I can't,' sobbed Espérance, 'if you knew how naughty I am growing you would not say so. I am miserable; and it makes me more wicked every day—and—no one cares.'

Frances' heart sank. It was hard to contradict even the last statement, knowing what she did of Mrs. Mortlake and the Collinsons. Happily she remembered Gaspard.

'Your brother cares,' she said.

'Gaspard!' with a fresh rush of tears; 'yes, he does, but he is away, I may not see him again for years. Ah, it is cruel! heartless! Why need they have separated us! How can I be grateful!' and she sobbed over this grievance more than over her home yearnings.

Then as Frances' words recurred to her, she returned to her tone of expostulation.

'How can it be all for the best? It is what all the sermons say, and the hymns—it is what papa himself told me, but I cannot, cannot believe it. When one sees and feels that things are doing one harm, how is one to believe that they "work together for good?"'

'But, dear Espérance, I don't want to remind you of Sœur Thérèse, but surely troubles are sent as discipline! My aches and pains, for instance, to teach me patience, and your loneliness to teach you, perhaps, to love.'

'To love! no, it is knocking all the love out of me, I loved before when I was happy, but this is making me cold, hard, icy, just as they are.'

Frances had wished to steer clear of the Deanery, and was not pleased at the allusion, nor in truth was Espérance herself, for she was too well bred not to feel that mention of her cousins' failings ought to be strictly guarded against.

She gave a little, impatient sigh.

'I am getting rude and altogether bad, and as Cornelia is always saying, I have no self-control. Oh, dear! if one

could only understand things, and learn the lessons they teach quickly, and see the reasons, and be happy!'

'You make me think of one of Keble's hymns; if you will put up with the English I will say you the lines.' And clearly and softly, so that even that much-abused language sounded sweetly in Espérance's ears, Frances repeated:—

> 'Till Death the weary spirit free,
> Thy God hath said, "'Tis good for thee
> To walk by faith, and not by sight:"
> Take it on trust a little while;
> Soon shalt thou read the mystery right
> In the full sunshine of His smile.'

Espérance mused in silence for a few minutes, then said:—'Yes, that is very beautiful, and it is just what I wanted. It seems almost like talking with papa. I remember he used to say, if we could believe that it would make all life happy, and I will indeed try. And yet I have tried, and always failed. It is easy to think so now when I am happy, but by-and-by——'

'By-and-by,' repeated Frances, 'you will learn to "take it on trust," and though the troubles will be troubles still, you will try to learn the lessons they are meant to teach. It all sounds trite and easy enough, I know, but, of course, all discipline is grievous, and you must not expect to be quite free from failures.'

'But why did you say that I must learn to love?' asked Espérance, with a little reluctance.

'Why, is not that the beginning of everything? Your father must have thought of the love as well as of the faith when he spoke of all life being happy.'

'*A ceux qui aiment Dieu*,' repeated Espérance, under her breath; and therewith came before her that vividly-remembered scene, when, walking together on the moss-grown terrace of the Château, her father had prepared her

for coming troubles. And now all his pain was over, and he *had* 'read the mystery right.' She dwelt for a minute or two on the happiness of the last thought before turning to her own difficulties. She was to learn to love, Frances had said. Did she really love her uncle, or Cornelia, or Christabel, or Bella? and was not her love for Bertha still very feeble? The questions were more easily than satisfactorily answered, and with a great sigh she hurried back to make the most of the present.

'I had forgotten your head, let me stroke it again.'

Frances, fully understanding, allowed her to do so for a few minutes, then drew her down to be fondled in her turn, saying, half playfully, at the same time, 'And never say again to me that "no one cares," or I shall take it as a personal insult.'

What a luxury that little bit of demonstration was! After all, Espérance had a good deal of what Cornelia called the 'spoilt baby' in her, and it was the hunger for the tender caressing love she had been used to, which had been gnawing at her heart for the last six months.

After a time, eager footsteps were heard outside, and with a hurried knock little Kathie burst into the room.

'Oh, Aunt Fanny! mamma sent me to ask if Espérance will not stay with us to see the fireworks; papa says we shall have them to-night because it is so clear. And you *will* stay, won't you?' turning eagerly to Espérance. 'It will be such fun, and we may help to let them off, and you can, too, you know.'

Espérance looked bewildered, till Frances explained.

'It has been a long talked-of treat for the children, and my brother-in-law has laid in a store of fireworks. You will stay, will you not? It will be delightful to keep you for the night.'

'To stay here for the night!' and Espérance started

to her feet in such an ecstasy that Frances hardly knew whether she felt inclined to laugh or cry at the sight.

'Then you will stay?' questioned Kathie, eagerly.

'Yes, indeed—that is, if there is really nothing to hinder it,' said Espérance. 'My cousin——'

'Suppose you go downstairs and settle it,' said Frances. 'Kathie, take Espérance to the drawing-room, and mind you don't let her run away.'

The two hastened away, hand-in-hand, while Frances was left to muse over the conversation, marvelling at Espérance's utter want of reserve, and wondering if she had given good counsel.

In a few minutes she heard the Deanery carriage drive off; then after a pause in which she grew a little impatient, steps were heard approaching, and Lady Worthington opened the door. Her face was a mixture of triumph and amusement.

'She stays?' asked Frances.

'Yes, she stays,' replied her sister, laughing. 'But if only you had been downstairs to have seen it all! Mrs. Mortlake was all anxiety to put a stop to it, but was quite nonplussed; I only hope she is not offended with us.'

'But why did she object?'

'Oh, she invented all sorts of excuses, from the Cathedral service upwards, and really, when it came to the Dean not liking her to be absent I was afraid we should have to give it up, though a more lame excuse I can't imagine. As if he ever attended to such sublunary matters! However, then Henry came in and took just the right line, laughed at me for not even knowing whether Espérance would like to stay, and sent Kathie up here with a message.'

'Poor Espérance, I pity her coming down to such a conclave.'

'Oh, she was quite self-possessed, and, I fancy, very much enjoyed being quit of Mrs. Mortlake. It was great fun to see them together, though I am afraid they might have been more plain-spoken if they had been alone. As it was, Espérance deferred to her cousin just enough, but made it very evident that she would like to stay, putting in half-a-dozen pretty little speeches about giving trouble and want of preparation, while Mrs. Mortlake was stumbling over one. Henry was enchanted with her, and I have left him doing *paterfamilias*, with Espérance in one hand, Kathie in the other, and boys everywhere, going to see the exhibition of rabbits.'

'Poor child, she will enjoy it. Oh, Katharine, she does want spoiling a little. She must have a dreadful time of it at the Deanery.'

'I am glad you have come to my way of thinking,' said Lady Worthington, with a smile.

'No, not altogether. I have tried my line, but it brought to light so much unhappiness, that I am sure we must give her all the love we can, to counteract the Deanery influence.'

'I quite agree with you. Well, I must not waste any more time in gossiping; there will be just time to go down to the village and ask the school children to come up this evening to see the show.'

'I am glad they are coming; but what will Miles say to his beloved lawn being trampled on?'

'My dear, what is the use of having a garden if you can't do what you like with it? I have conquered my coachman, and I don't mean to be a slave to my gardener. I shall give a general invitation to the whole village.'

It seemed that the whole village accepted the invitation, for by seven o'clock the lawn was crowded with expectant watchers, Mr. Miles himself being one of the number,

good-naturedly willing to make the best of this invasion of his territory, and secretly enjoying the little excitement as much as anybody. On the terrace Sir Henry had arranged his apparatus, about which Harry and Fred hovered importantly, while Kathie, half afraid of such unknown things, kept fast hold of Espérance's hand, and when the first rocket was let off with a mysterious whiz and upward rush, fairly dragged her away.

There was something weird and wonderful about the whole scene, and the awe-struck silence, or murmurs of admiration of the rustic spectators, were equally impressive. Espérance, though she had seen far grander displays at Paris, had never enjoyed any so much, and she was as eager as the boys were to try her hand at letting off squibs or crackers, while Kathie soon lost her fear and pleaded for a 'Catherine wheel,' 'to do all herself.' Then after a shower of brilliant, many-coloured snakes, and an elaborate device, the assembly broke up, the villagers going home with lusty cheers, in which Harry and Fred could not resist joining, in spite of their mother's laughing remonstrance.

Afterwards, there was a rush to 'Aunt Fanny's' room, and a rapturous account of all that had been done, Frances listening with the greatest interest, and quite entering into it all, though Espérance was sure—by the sharp contraction of her forehead every now and then—that she was in great pain.

In a few minutes, however, Lady Worthington came in, and put an end to the chatter with—'Now, children, go to bed; I am sure you are all tired.'

'Not a bit, mamma,' said the boys. But they were obedient enough, in spite of their uproarious wildness, and went off at once.

After they were gone, Lady Worthington, Frances, and

Espérance sat over the fire, talking, till Frances, thinking that three was no company, wished them good-night, and left her sister to win Espérance's love in a *tête-à-tête.*

And very well she succeeded. Any experience of real motherly tenderness was entirely new to the poor child, and she was soon clinging to Lady Worthington with all the ardour of newly-awakened love, and talking almost more freely than she had done with Frances. They did not touch on Espérance's present life at all, but Lady Worthington, with the greatest tact, spoke of her mother, recalling two or three incidents in her life, which her little daughter listened to eagerly, and then going on to tell of her brief visit to the Château de Mabillon, when Gaspard was a baby, making Espérance smile by her descriptions, though it is true the tears were not far off, and came down in showers when the conversation turned to the troubles in the siege. Yet it was a comfort to her to talk, particularly to one who had known her father in however slight a degree; and when Lady Worthington learnt that she had never spoken to her cousins, or to any one except Claude Magnay, on the subject, she knew that it would be a real kindness not to shun the topic, feeling sure that it must be bad for one so unreserved by nature, to be shut into herself by the mistaken kindness of others.

So Espérance disburdened her heart, and was warmed and cheered, and finally tucked up in bed by the motherly Lady Worthington, who had found a *protégée* quite after her own heart.

When she went down to her husband in the drawing-room, she could not resist giving vent to her feelings about the Collinsons, and Rilchester people in general, who, by their senseless want of tact and sympathy, had given the poor child such a bad idea of English people.

'Your patriotic soul is grieved, eh, Kate?' said Sir Henry, smiling.

'Well, I really don't think it is fair. The Dean is a kind-hearted man—at least you are always saying so, but why does he not see to this child? They will ruin her soon, if he does not descend from his celestial heights.'

'Don't speak evil of dignitaries, my dear.'

'I can't help it, I never did like Dean Collinson, and I never shall. In this as in everything else, he seems to me blindly selfish. I can't see why any man, however clever he may be, should receive an enormous salary for doing nothing in the world except looking through his own telescope.'

'Shocking! shocking!' said Sir Henry, but he laughed, nevertheless. 'Well, Kate, you are a wonderful woman, and in time I daresay you will reform Rilchester, but I very much doubt if you will sever the Dean and his hobby, or rouse him to a sense of his duties.'

And even hopeful and enterprising Lady Worthington fully acquiesced.

CHAPTER XX.

> 'Oh! ye, who sunk in beds of down,
> Feel not a want, but what yourselves create,
> Think for a moment on his wretched fate
> Whom friends and fortune quite disown.'
>
> BURNS.

ESPÉRANCE went back to Rilchester really the better for her visit to the Worthingtons, and with a desire to make the best of everything at the Deanery. She was far brighter than she had been before, and made honest efforts to love her cousins, and though she was daily in despair over her failures the endeavour was doing her great good.

Nor was she by any means destitute of pleasures. Frances Neville lent her books, took her for drives in her little pony carriage, and talked in French as much as she pleased.

Mrs. Mortlake, it is true, was fond of making unpleasant allusions to Espérance's 'new friend,' and Cornelia indulged in a few sarcasms at her expense, but Espérance could endure this as long as she was allowed still to see Frances.

Soon after Christmas, Bella had a sharp attack of bronchitis, and was so much pulled down by it that as soon as the mild February days began it was decided that she should be taken to the south. Accordingly Mrs. Mortlake, with Espérance as a companion and help, went down to Bournemouth with the fractious little invalid. It was not a lively prospect certainly, and Espérance regretted leaving Rilchester while the Worthingtons were still at home, knowing that by the time they returned in the spring, the Hall would be empty and deserted. Had it not been for the delicious sea air, and the change of scene, she could hardly have borne the ceaseless fret of her life. Bella was both cross and troublesome, and Mrs. Mortlake being anxious and harassed, and at times rather dull, was more fault-finding and wearisome than usual.

Frances Neville's good counsels, and still more her example, were however fresh in Espérance's mind, and she struggled hard against the despondency and fretfulness which were now her chief temptations, and at last her reward came. Towards the end of their stay at Bournemouth, one rainy, dismal afternoon, when Bella had been more provoking than ever, a letter arrived from Dean Collinson to Mrs. Mortlake, with news which made Espérance almost frantic with delight.

'My father proposes meeting us in London,' said Mrs. Mortlake, calmly. 'He says:—

'"Cornelia and I intend to come up to town next Tuesday, the day you fixed for your return, and if you will leave Bournemouth by an early train, I will see you across London; in the afternoon we have an engagement. Cornelia suggests that your cousin might like to see her brother on the way through, in which case she can return with us by a later train."'

Espérance uttered half-a-dozen exclamations in French —then, recovering her senses, went on more quietly in English.

'How very good of them to think of it. To see Gaspard once more! and so soon, too, scarcely a week, it seems too good to be true!'

'It will be very tiresome for me to have to take Bella home all alone,' said Mrs. Mortlake, 'you have no consideration.'

Luckily, Esperance's delight was too deep to be much affected by this wet blanket, nor did she suffer from any pangs of conscience at her desertion of Bella—Gaspard must stand first; and she was in such spirits, that she even turned Mrs. Mortlake's complaint into a sort of compliment, and made herself half believe that she liked it.

How long that week seemed! Yet the anticipation was so delightful that she could afford to wait patiently, and she went about the house with such a radiant face, that Mrs. Mortlake, in spite of herself, was touched.

At length the great day came. Early in the morning the first start was made, and without a shadow of regret —her heart was too full of joy for that—Espérance bade farewell to Bournemouth, to the sea, to the pinewoods, to the sands, and in an ecstacy of happiness, counted the minutes till their arrival.

It was curious to be met by such quiet, uninterested people as the Dean and Cornelia, and a little hard to be quite attentive enough to cloaks and umbrellas. But at length all was happily over, the drive across London accomplished, and Mrs. Mortlake left with Cornelia at the station to await her train, while the Dean himself escorted Espérance to Gaspard's rooms.

Perhaps had she not been so happy, she would have cared more about the baker's shop, and the shabby lodgings, which would probably shock her uncle; but she had not a thought to spare for any one but Gaspard, and sprang from the cab without the least diffidence, running into the shop with all speed to shake hands with the landlady, and leading the astonished and dismayed Dean up the dark, narrow staircase. In another moment a door on the first landing was quickly opened, and Espérance, with a cry of joy, flew into Gaspard's arms, while the Dean, shading his eyes with his hand, looked on bewildered, but half touched. Espérance soon remembered her uncle, and disengaging herself from Gaspard's embrace turned to him with an apologetic, wistful glance.

'Forgive me, for keeping you waiting, uncle, I ought to introduce Gaspard to you.'

The Dean held out his hand, muttered something polite, and was taken into the dingy little room, which Espérance remembered so well, but which looked far more shabby and comfortless than in her time.

No sooner had she turned to feast her eyes with the sight of Gaspard, however, than her happiness was suddenly chilled, for he was looking very ill, pale, and worn, and frightfully thin, while the scar on his cheek added to the ghastliness of the whole face. She could not help contrasting him with the sleek, comfortable, well-to-do Dean, who took everything so easily, and found life so

pleasant. Apparently, however, he was not quite at his ease now, for he moved his hat nervously between his hands, and seemed to find conversation a difficulty, so Espérance thought at least, for Gaspard, in very fairly good English, did almost all the talking, while she counted from the Dean six consecutive remarks of, 'Oh, indeed.' He rose to go very soon, to her relief, Gaspard promising to bring her to the station in time for the 5.45 express, and escorting his guest to the door, with a grave dignity, which reminded Espérance of her father.

She grudged the interruption, and waited impatiently till he returned.

'Ten minutes out of our precious time,' she said, half petulantly, as after a few parting words with the Dean, Gaspard hurried upstairs. 'What were you saying to him?'

'Only a little gratitude, which I couldn't bring myself to with you near, my precious *Bien-Aimée*. What a delight it is to have you! Let me have a good look at you.'

Each surveyed the other in silence. Gaspard was apparently well satisfied, for the 'Mariana' look which he had feared, was not there; but Espérance, after a moment, hid her face on his shoulder and burst into tears.

'*Chérie*, what is it?' he asked, full of concern. 'Are you unhappy at Rilchester? is anything wrong?'

'It is not that,' she sobbed. 'But, oh, Gaspard, you can't think how ill you look!'

'Is that all?' he said, laughing. 'Don't break your heart over such trifles—do let us enjoy ourselves in the few hours we have together.'

She made an unsuccessful effort to check her sobs, and he, fearing that his attempt to turn away from the subject had wounded her, returned to it.

'*Mon amie*, it is very pleasant to be thought for, and

spoiled once more, but you must not really think I am ill. It is not half so trying as life during the siege, and the quality of the food is much better—thinness is natural to the family.'

'But tell me, Gaspard, are you really living still without meat?' asked Espérance, with an earnestness which made him laugh.

'Yes, I am turned vegetarian, teetotaler, and all sorts of virtuous things.'

'And at the Deanery,' exclaimed Espérance, passionately, 'even Bella's wretched little cat has meat every day.'

Gaspard laughed uncontrollably, and Espérance, seeing the ludicrous side of her remark, at length joined him.

'Poor Bismarck! don't you think you could take him back with you to that happy place, he is not half so well used.'

'If only you were there!'

'What! to eat those terrible breakfasts at eight o'clock, and those joints of meat, which you described to me with such horror? Have you forgotten what happened when

"Autrefois le rat de ville
Invita le rat des champs?"

You would find me sighing for Bismarck, and my *eau sucré* by the end of the first day.'

Espérance was soon talked back to cheerfulness, and relieved Gaspard greatly by the account she gave of herself, and of the kindness Lady Worthington and Miss Neville had shown her. She wisely refrained from showing the darker side of her life at the Deanery, anxious, as far as possible, to make him easy about her.

'Your funds must want replenishing,' said Gaspard, when he had heard all she had to tell of her present life 'How have you managed to get on?'

'Oh, I have done very well,' said Espérance, 'and I don't want anything yet. I have been making up some of my old coloured dresses, this spring.'

'But, *chérie*, you can't have existed for ten months on that sovereign I gave you last June, and yet have such a nice turn out.'

'You men know nothing whatever about such things,' said Espérance, laughing gaily. 'That sovereign lasted me till Christmas, and then, luckily, uncle gave me another as a Christmas present, and that is to last another six months. Then besides, someone sent me three pairs of gloves as a valentine, so now you know all my resources. The idea of my having anything from you! What do you take me for, Gaspard?'

'For a very wonderful little manager,' said Gaspard, smiling. 'But, seriously, it will be the greatest help to me, for as you know, money is not too abundant, nor likely to be.'

'I used to hope that poor M. Lemercier would somehow come miraculously to the rescue, and find that our losses had not, after all, been so great. Have you heard from him lately, Gaspard?'

'No, not from him, but from Madame,' replied Gaspard, sadly. Then, as Espérance looked up inquiringly, 'I wanted you not to hear of it, *chérie*, but since you have asked that cannot be. Poor M. Lemercier was arrested as a Communist.'

'He was not shot!' exclaimed Espérance, horror-struck.

'No, no, that he did escape, though poor Madame was kept in suspense for some time. He is transported for life.'

'Poor Monsieur! Oh, I am so grieved for him! Do you not remember, Gaspard, how earnest—almost noble—

he looked when he wished us good-bye?—how hopeful he was about the Commune!'

Gaspard gave a heavy sigh.

'Poor Lemercier! if ever a man meant well, he did. Well, *chérie*, if it had not been for you, I might perhaps have been with him, and the disgrace of that would be worse than starving here.'

The words slipped from him inadvertently. Espérance shuddered, but took no notice of them, fearing to vex him.

'And poor Madame?' she asked, after a brief silence.

'It is some months since I had her letter, she was in France then, but bent on working her way out to him. Of course they are ruined, for M. Lemercier never had a notion of saving, so she was looking out for a situation as governess.'

'Poor Madame! how sad for her! But she is brave and good-hearted, she will join Monsieur before long, without doubt. Oh, Gaspard, how I wish I were old enough to go out as a governess, then I could help you, perhaps.'

'You do that already by your economy; besides, I am not in despair yet. I have heard it said, that if work is honestly wished for, and really sought, it comes sooner or later.'

'But in the meantime?' said Espérance, with a quiver in her voice.

'We must endure, *chérie*, and trust in God.'

His tones were grave and low, and Espérance, in spite of a thrill of happiness, was awed by them. She was more and more reminded of her father, and though her heart ached when she thought of Gaspard's sufferings, there was comfort in seeing how good was being brought out of evil. A year ago he had been miserable and depressed,

out of heart with himself, and in every way unsettled; now, notwithstanding his troubles, he was more hopeful, and more bravely patient, while Espérance was conscious of a certain growth and expansion of his whole character, which, though she could not in the least fathom it, enabled her to lean where she had before upheld, and to reverence where she had simply loved.

The clock struck five all too soon; and when Gaspard spoke of preparing for the start, a terrible yearning to stay with him almost overmastered her. To go back to the weary, struggling, scolded life at Rilchester, after the short respite, seemed almost unbearable, and had it not been for her anxiety to leave Gaspard well satisfied with her comfort and happiness, she must have given way. But the loving little deception helped her, and she kept up bravely. Just at the last, the landlady, who had been very fond of her, brought up some coffee, which she begged Ma'm'selle to accept; and Espérance, who had tasted nothing since the morning, made an effort to be grateful, drove back her tears, and managed to swallow some of it, and to talk to the good-natured woman.

In spite of her dread of leaving Gaspard, she almost looked forward to the time when she might allow herself to break down, the torture of this prolonged parting was worse than anything, and it was really a kind of relief when they set out for the station. They found Cornelia and the Dean walking up and down the platform, and Espérance rather enjoyed introducing Gaspard to her cousin.

Cornelia, who had from the first been much more desirous to help Gaspard than to adopt his sister, was evidently struck with him, talked with him, at first patronisingly, but soon with real cordiality, and showed her best side; while Espérance was unselfish enough to be thankful

that her little plot was thus aided. Gaspard's last words, spoken rapidly in French, proved how successful she had been.

'Good-bye, *mon cœur*, if you knew the unutterable comfort it is to see you thus well taken care of!'

He was satisfied, a care was taken off his mind, it was well! but as the train moved slowly off, and the necessity for restraint was no longer felt, an agony of loneliness overwhelmed the poor child. Would it have been better, she wondered, if she had told all her troubles to Gaspard and gained that sympathy for which she was craving? Was she right to let him think that she was happy and contented, when in truth she was miserable? And yet those thankful words at parting were worth suffering for; if she had denied herself the relief of a complete outpouring of her heart, it had at least gained peace of mind for him, had taken something from his many troubles. But there her self-control gave way, and the long pent-up tears burst forth, as she thought of the many privations he had tried unsuccessfully to hide from her.

The Dean was engrossed in his newspaper at the further end of the carriage, moreover, he was a little deaf; but from the all-observing Cornelia nothing could be concealed. She had been prepared for a few natural tears, but when the long-drawn, quivering sobs continued, and even grew more violent, she thought it time to interfere, and began a low-toned but decided remonstrance.

'My dear Espérance, do control yourself, it is so childish to go on this way, you weaken your whole character by it.'

It was very true no doubt, but she was past being reasoned with—what did her character signify when Gaspard was starving? So she sobbed on, while Cornelia scolded without any effect, until at last, alarmed at the

increasing paleness of Espérance's face, she asked suddenly the startled matter-of-fact question, 'Have you had any dinner?'

A half impatient 'No' was the answer.

'What! nothing at all since the morning?'

'Some coffee,' sobbed Espérance, still impatiently.

'You foolish child, then of course you are faint with hunger. Why can't you take proper care of yourself?'

'Do you think I would not rather bear that, than take anything from Gaspard?' said Espérance, indignation for a moment checking her tears. 'You rich people have no conception what real poverty means! would you have me take care of myself, when he has been starving for months on bread and *eau sucré?*'

'Is that really a fact?' asked Cornelia, greatly shocked, while the Dean, hearing an unusual noise looked up from his paper, and bent forward to listen. Espérance was just sufficiently alive to feel that a crisis had come; with an effort she raised herself, grasped the arm of the seat, and choking back her tears, said, 'I have done wrong, Cornelia, he would not wish anyone to know of his privations, pray forget what I said.'

'I can make no such promise,' said Cornelia, coldly, 'besides, if as I infer this is really true, it is not a thing to be forgotten.'

Espérance had fallen back to her former position, but through her tears Cornelia caught the words, 'He would not like—more obligations.'

Perhaps her vexation at this accounted for the very severe way in which she administered wine from a flask to Espérance.

'Now pray drink this and stop crying at once; if you had a tithe of your brother's powers of endurance, this would not have happened.'

It was certainly neither complimentary nor consoling, but Espérance's loving nature was more pleased by the reference to Gaspard's virtues, than stung by the reproach to herself. She swallowed the wine, revived a little, dried her eyes, and cowered down into her corner, where she soon fell asleep.

Cornelia sat watching her gravely; stern and unsympathetic as she had seemed, her heart was really touched, and Espérance's outburst, with its pride and pathos, had awakened her compassion. She was genuinely sorry for the poor child, but to let this appear in word or deed seemed to her impossible, and after the salutary scolding she had administered, she would have deemed it mere weakness to change her tactics; so that it was not until Espérance was fast asleep, that she undid her cloak straps, and spread a warm shawl over her.

Then she moved to the seat beside the Dean, and began in her business-like way, 'Father, I wish you would help that poor boy to some work, he looks so ill. Do you not know of something he could do in Rilchester? Did I not hear that the Librarian wanted some copying done?'

'We do not want him at Rilchester,' said the Dean a little sharply, 'I have had foreigners to my house once too often, we don't want your poor Aunt Amy's story acted over again.'

'Bertha!' exclaimed Cornelia, 'oh! that could never be, he is a mere boy, too.'

'A thorough De Mabillon,' said the Dean. 'The very image of his father, manners and all; a substratum of pride, then a coating of dignity, and over all that detestable French polish. Pshaw! why can't a man be plain spoken! I hate palaver.'

Cornelia smiled at her father's unwonted energy.

'But you would scarcely wish to leave even a Frenchman to starve, and I am afraid it has nearly come to that with Gaspard de Mabillon.'

'My dear Cornelia, you are quite mistaken if you think I am going to adopt both M. de Mabillon's children. I have taken in the little girl for your poor aunt's sake, but further than that I will not go.'

'So her firstborn must starve, because of that limit you put upon your good-will,' said Cornelia, with more sarcasm than respect.

The Dean shifted about uneasily, looking thoroughly miserable. To be forced to talk of anything but the heavenly bodies, was pain and grief to him at any time, but when the earthly bodies under dispute happened to be De Mabillons, his wretchedness was complete, for he had never forgiven M. de Mabillon, and yet was ashamed to remember that he had not done so.

'What can I do for him?' he asked at length, galled by the consciousness of this unrepented, yet would-be forgotten sin.

Cornelia had been thinking deeply for some minutes, and her answer was ready sooner than the Dean cared for.

'I have been thinking, father, could you not write to Mr. Seymour?'

'How do you know that the young man has any liking for coffee planting?' questioned the Dean, glad of an excuse.

'I fancy he has a liking for anything that will give him bread, poor fellow. Mr. Seymour's furlough will be over soon, I should think, and if he knows of any opening for him in Ceylon they might go out together.'

'And pray who is to bear the cost of the premium?'

'Let us wait till we know there is a premium to pay,'

said Cornelia, composedly, and there she allowed the conversation to rest, satisfied that she had gained her point.

The Dean soon forgot his vexation in sleep, and Cornelia sat musing, while the silence was only broken by a little half sob from Espérance every now and then. Cornelia watched her apprehensively, hoping that she had heard nothing of what had passed, and wondering how the new idea would please her. On the whole, in spite of her apparent contempt, she was nearer liking her than she had ever been before, and even betrayed no irritation when on arriving at Rilchester, Espérance awoke confused and weary, and persisted in speaking French.

CHAPTER XXI.

'If loving hearts were never lonely,
If all they wished might always be,
Accepting what they look for only,
They might be glad—but not in Thee.

'We need as much the cross we bear
As air we breathe, as light we see;
It draws us to Thy side in prayer,
It binds us to our strength in Thee!'

A. L. Waring.

Rilchester again with its quiet, undisturbed streets, and its busy tongues; the Cathedral with its daily services and its thin congregations; the Deanery, with all its luxurious discomfort, and the weary, distasteful life once more. Strive as Espérance would to be thankful and contented, it was of no use—each day seemed more burdensome, each petty trial more unbearable. It was an intolerable effort to be even ordinarily polite to everyone, and when Bella was provoking she was sorely tempted to box her ears.

Cornelia told her openly that her visit to Gaspard had upset her, that she was ungrateful for the kindness shown her, and that she ought to be ashamed of herself. Mrs. Mortlake put everything down to the long holiday at Bournemouth, and was always on the look out for fresh employment for her. Bella's nurse, a kind-hearted, sensible person, suggested that Mademoiselle felt the spring weather, and should take a tonic.

April passed into May, and the alternations of cold east wind and hot sunshine did not improve matters. Espérance grew more and more languid and depressed; she could not sleep, she could not eat, she could not even think clearly. The one idea impressed on her mind was that Gaspard was alone and starving, and this thought never left her; by day, she dwelt on it with silent despair, by night, with bitter tears—in her brief intervals of restless sleep it haunted her dreams.

Things went on in this way for about a month. Cornelia was beginning to feel alarmed, and to watch her with real though carefully-disguised anxiety.

One day when the lessons had gone worse than usual, and Espérance felt that she really deserved a scolding, she was surprised by the sudden question, 'You do not feel well, Espérance, I am sure. What is the matter with you?'

'I do not know,' she answered, languidly.

'But you must know what you feel like; come, tell me at once.'

'I don't feel anything, particular.'

'Would you like to see a doctor?'

'Oh, no, thank you, I have nothing to say.'

Cornelia was not at all satisfied with the spiritless tone of her answers. She had lost all her brightness and

energy, and whereas she had before been eager and responsive, she was now silent and apathetic.

'You need not prepare your lessons for to-morrow, we will read together instead,' said Cornelia, after a minute's thought, watching to see what effect this would have. There was some slight shade of relief in Espérance's 'Thank you,' but it seemed as if nothing could make very much difference to her now.

Just then the gong sounded for luncheon, and the two went downstairs together, Cornelia feeling uneasy and puzzled. In the dining-room they found the Dean and their cousin George Palgrave, who had just arrived on a visit. Espérance looked at him rather curiously, remembering with a pang the scene of their last meeting. He was not the least changed in appearance, but he seemed less awkward, a fact which she naughtily explained as owing to her increased acquaintance with Englishmen. He won her heart, however, by inquiring after Gaspard, for though the question was hard to answer, and brought the ready tears to her eyes, it showed that he was not forgotten.

Cornelia watched Espérance carefully, noticed her reply to George Palgrave's question, the sudden blush which rose to her cheek quickly succeeded by deadly paleness, the almost impatient gesture with which she rejected the dishes handed to her, and her languid attempts to eat a few mouthfuls of what was before her. All brought to her mind that sharp, despairing sentence, which had so startled her, 'Should I take care of myself—when he is starving?' It must then be this trouble which was weighing down Espérance; she should know as soon as possible that help was at hand.

Several letters had passed between Mr. Seymour and the Dean, and Cornelia knew that Mr. Seymour intended

to have a personal interview with Gaspard, and that if pleased with him, it was highly probable that he would give him employment. Matters were arranged even more quickly than she had expected, that very afternoon the Dean received letters, both from the coffee-planter and from Gaspard.

'Mr. Seymour really takes him?' asked Cornelia, anxiously.

'Yes, he seems much pleased with him, you can read his letter, and the young man himself writes very properly. I am glad something is settled, it has been a most troublesome correspondence.'

'You will tell Espérance, will you not, father?'

'Oh, well, yes, if you think best, but send her here quickly for I am very busy, and have been sadly hindered this morning by George.'

'She shall come at once. You remember, father, she has no idea of this, it will be a great surprise to her.'

'Yes, yes, I understand, my dear, only let us waste no more time.'

Cornelia hastened away in search of Espérance, not feeling quite satisfied. After all, would this help which she had taken so much pains to secure, be very acceptable to her little cousin? She wished Ceylon were not so far off, or that she had persuaded her father to try for some English appointment for Gaspard; and then wished heartily that she had more tact and sympathy, or could fancy in the least what her feelings would be, on hearing that her imaginary brother was to be shipped off to the other side of the world.

Poor Cornelia! in spite of all her wishes, her voice was as cold and peremptory as ever when at last she found Espérance.

'My father wants to speak to you in the library, no,

pray don't fidget about your hair, it is quite tidy, and he is in a hurry.'

Espérance went without a word. A few months ago she would have been excited by such an unusual request, now she only raised her eyebrows slightly. Cornelia would almost have been thankful for one of those objectionable French expletives, this silence seemed so unnatural, and with many misgivings, she watched her as she went slowly down the dark staircase, her hand passing languidly over the banister rail.

The Dean was pacing up and down the library when Espérance entered.

'Cornelia said you wished to speak to me, uncle,' she said, approaching him.

'Yes, my dear, just for a few minutes upon a little matter of business—take this chair. Cornelia told me that your brother could meet with no employment, and that he was in fact in very poor circumstances, and I have been trying for some weeks to find some suitable situation for him.'

'Dear uncle, how very good you are,' cried Espérance, springing up with all her old energy, 'and you have really found something for him?'

'Yes, Mr. Seymour, a friend of mine, has offered him a situation on his estate in Ceylon, and your brother seems very much pleased with it.'

Espérance tried to believe that she did not hear rightly, it had never entered her head to think of work for Gaspard out of England; she turned giddy at the thought, and sinking back into the chair from which she had started in such an ecstasy of hope, asked faintly, 'Ceylon, did you say, uncle?'

'Yes, Ceylon, my dear, on a coffee plantation, very interesting work, no doubt, and a most fortunate opening

for your brother. I am very happy to have been the means of introducing him to Mr. Seymour, I am sure.'

'You are very kind,' said poor Espérance, feeling rather as if she were thanking her executioner, and trying hard to grasp this new idea, though well aware that the realisation would bring pain.

'Don't mention it, my dear,' said the Dean, absently. 'Three o'clock is it? Dear me there was something at three, surely? Ah! that tiresome Missionary Meeting! I must go at once. The Archdeacon might have taken the chair instead, I am sure—what's in a name?' Then half rousing himself, 'Here are the letters, you may read them, Espérance, by-the-by, there was one enclosed to you from your brother,' and the Dean hastily delivered the whole packet of letters to his niece, and hurried off with muttered grumblings about a 'dull deputation,' and 'missionary twaddle.'

Espérance took the letters eagerly, and began to read Mr. Seymour's, marvelling at her own composure. He spoke very kindly of Gaspard, and agreed to take him to Ceylon with him, offering him a salary of 100*l.* a-year to begin with, and a prospect of speedy advancement. Then came Gaspard's letter of thanks to the Dean, written in English, and this failed to awaken Espérance's feelings, for she could not realise that it was his writing at all. Lastly, there was the little enclosed envelope directed to herself, which she opened eagerly, and read through fast-falling tears.

'My very dear one,—I have been offered a very good post on a coffee plantation in Ceylon, by a friend of Dean Collinson. I thought long before accepting it, for I cannot endure the thought of leaving you alone in England; but at last I have made up my mind to it. It seems

wrong to refuse such an offer, and you see, *mon cœur*, the sooner I begin to earn something, the sooner your exile will end. Perhaps in three or four years you will be able to join me in Ceylon, and we shall be independent once more. This is worth all sacrifice and all present pain to my mind. Am I wrong in thinking that you will agree with me? How I wish we could have talked it over together! These letters are terribly unsatisfactory things. The whole affair is such a mixture of pain and relief, that I hardly know how to support it. I shall, indeed, be only too thankful to be at work again, but the separation from you, *chérie*, will be well nigh unbearable——'

Unbearable! Yes, indeed! Espérance could read no further, and throwing aside the letter, she buried her face in her hands, sobbing unrestrainedly. To be away from Gaspard—thousands of miles away—with a vague hope held out to her of seeing him again in three or four years! How was it to be endured? Was life worth having when it was so full of pain?

In the midst of this outbreak, Cornelia opened the door, full of anxiety to know how Espérance liked the new idea. She made a gesture of annoyance when she saw her leaning on the Dean's writing-table, her face hidden, and the open letter pushed aside. Why must French people always be having 'scenes?' Tears were so contemptible and weak in Cornelia's opinion, she could not sympathise with sorrow that found such an outlet.

'Why are you crying in this way?' she asked, coldly. 'Come, pray control yourself, you are getting quite hysterical.'

Espérance raised her head, and made an effort to check her sobs. If Cornelia would only have taken her in her arms, would have given her but one caress, or said one

kind word, the relief would have been unspeakable; as it was, her coldness only added to pain already almost intolerable.

It had the effect she desired, however, of forcing Espérance to control herself, though, whether the unnatural calmness to which she schooled herself was really good for her, is doubtful.

'How is it that you are so inconsistent?' asked Cornelia. 'A month ago you were crying because your brother had no work, and now that he has met with a good appointment you are crying again.'

'The separation!' said poor Espérance, afraid of breaking down again if she said too much.

'Nonsense! why you are separated now practically, it is only a question of thousands of miles instead of hundreds. Besides, how selfish to think of that, when it is for his good.'

It was very true no doubt, but Espérance was too sore-hearted to find much comfort in this, moreover, all Cornelia said, though intended to be salutary, made the wound deeper, and the idea of being left behind in England more terrible. To be left alone!—alone!—so utterly alone! She could not even cry now; her tears seemed to be scorched up, her eyes felt hot and dry, and even Cornelia could not have desired anything more controlled than the voice which asked, in an odd, unnatural tone—'When does Mr. Seymour go?'

'At the end of June, I believe, that will be just a month from now. Your brother had better see about his outfit at once.'

'What kind of outfit do they require?' asked Espérance, wondering how it was to be obtained, and turning almost willingly to this practical difficulty, in the hope of stifling the pain.

'I have not the least idea, but probably Mr. Seymour will have told him all about that; does he not tell you in his letter?' and Cornelia glanced at the closely-written sheet which lay before her.

Espérance took it up and read to the end, and there, sure enough, was the formidable list of necessaries suggested by the coffee-planter, but which Gaspard looked upon as so impossible to obtain, that he mentioned them half laughingly. She was greatly perplexed.

'Well?' asked Cornelia.

'Yes, he speaks of it,' she replied, slowly. 'But I do not much understand such things, I am still only very young.'

The combination of adverbs offended Cornelia's ear, but she was touched by the pathos of the confession. There was something weary in the tone, as if it were sad still to have so much of life to look forward to, and it struck her that there was something strange and wrong in such a remark being made by a girl of scarcely seventeen, who should have been rejoicing in the hope of coming life, and proud of her age.

'I would not worry over the outfit if I were you,' she said, more kindly. 'No doubt your brother will manage it himself. You have a headache I am sure after all that crying, suppose you go out for a walk, you will just have time before afternoon service.'

Espérance was grateful for the kindness of this speech, and wearily assenting, folded Gaspard's letter and carried it up to her room, her mind still full of the difficulties of procuring his outfit. Whether it was from the relief of thinking of anything except her grief, or from the anxiety to be doing something for Gaspard while it was still possible, this idea quite absorbed her. The nineteen shillings in her purse were not consolatory—how little they would

procure for him! She racked her brains for some means of making money, but for some time it was quite in vain. At length an idea struck her—her face lighted up with eager hope, and hastily putting on her walking things, she followed Cornelia's advice and went out of doors.

No country walk was to be hers, however. She bent her steps towards the town, and walking hurriedly through the more frequented parts, reached a quiet side street, and entered a hairdresser's shop. Her heart was beating quickly, and her voice was a little tremulous as she made known her wishes to the master of the shop, a round-faced, grey-headed, cheery old man, who would not have betrayed his profession but for the extreme accuracy of his parting, and the elegant curve of the hair plastered down on his temples.

'For cutting only, miss? will you please to walk upstairs.'

Espérance obeyed, following her conductor to the shabby little room above, ostentatiously advertised as a 'Hair Cutting and Shampooing Saloon.' There she took off her hat, loosened her hair, and with heightened colour drew it out to its full length, and glanced at her reflection in the gilt-framed mirror.

'Just tipped, I suppose, miss?' said the hairdresser, arranging his implements, and surveying Espérance's beautiful hair with professional admiration.

'No, I want it cut off,' she said, half carelessly taking the chair he had placed for her, and tossing her hair over its back.

'Cut off, miss!' exclaimed the astonished hairdresser.

'Yes, please,' said Espérance, quietly.

'But, miss, you will excuse me, but it is such a pity, I have not seen such hair for many a day—so long, so thick, in such capital condition! Many ladies, miss,

would give any money to have such a head of hair; they would indeed, miss.'

'Would they?' asked Espérance, smiling. 'Then that is just what I want. In fact, Mr. Jenkinson, I may as well tell you that I want to sell my hair. How much would you give me for it?'

'Indeed, miss, I hardly know what I ought to say; but it seems a thousand pities to cut off such beautiful hair as that.'

'Never mind,' said Espérance, flushing crimson, 'I want money; what will you let me have for it?'

The man examined it more critically, felt its weight, and again admired it. It was, indeed, very beautiful—long and thick, yet at the same time both fine and glossy, the colour of the darkest shade of brown, while a soft waviness, ending in tendril-like ringlets, added not a little o its value. He thought for some minutes, then said, 'I would give five guineas for it, miss. If it were light coloured it would be worth twice that, light hair being fashionable. If you care to part with it for five guineas, though, I will take it.'

Espérance did not hesitate a moment.

'Thank you,' she said, eagerly, 'we will settle it then.' And without a shadow of regret she submitted to the hair-dresser's scissors, and thought of all that the five guineas would buy.

In ten minutes all was done, and Espérance, feeling rather cold and shorn, was walking back to the Cathedral, contemplating the little pile of coins in her hand with great satisfaction. The service over, she returned to the Deanery, and found afternoon tea going on in the drawing-room. Mrs. Mortlake had just returned from the Missionary Meeting, George Palgrave and Bertha were talking together by the window, Cornelia was pouring out

tea—an unusual thing—holding the teapot ungracefully high, so that the tea frothed into the cups.

'A very dull affair, indeed,' Mrs. Mortlake was saying. 'My father actually went to sleep in his chair, while a young converted Kaffir was speaking through an interpreter, such a creature, you should have seen——, why, Espérance!' breaking off suddenly, 'what in the world have you done to yourself? Are you trying to imitate our Kaffir friend?'

Espérance laughed and coloured, and there was a general exclamation.

'I have had my hair cut, that is all,' she said, quietly.

'Cut! Why, it is cropped all round your head! What is the meaning of this extraordinary freak?'

'I thought I could do very well without my hair, and I wanted it for something else.'

'Absurd! What have you done with it?'

'I have sold it,' said Espérance, blushing, and wishing Mrs. Mortlake would not be so inquisitive.

'Sold it!' Even Bertha joined in the exclamation.

Mrs. Mortlake, however, was more than surprised, an angry flush rose to her cheek as she continued.

'You sold it in Rilchester? How could you think of doing such an imprudent thing. It will be all over the place now, and every one will be gossiping about you.'

'I do not mind that,' said Espérance.

'Of course not,' said Cornelia, coming to the rescue. 'That is the most sensible thing that has been said yet. I'm sure I don't know why you make such a fuss, Christabel.'

'It's a disgrace to the house!' said Mrs. Mortlake, angrily. 'A most unladylike thing! and in a small place like this, where every one must know! Why, all Rilchester will talk!'

'Well, Espérance, the family seem to disagree about the matter,' said Cornelia, calmly. 'For my part I have never respected you so much before.'

Espérance looked up gratefully. The unexpected kindness was welcome enough, and she was still more thankful when Cornelia quietly turned the conversation away from the subject altogether, and succeeded in engrossing Mrs. Mortlake's attention.

As soon as possible she slipped out of the room, and went to the nursery to discuss ways and means with Bella's nurse, and was soon so deeply engaged in the necessary calculations for a set of shirts that she forgot the grievance of the lost hair.

'A spirited little creature,' said George Palgrave to Bertha, 'but what induced her to do such a thing?'

'Probably to help her brother; he is going out to Ceylon, you know.'

'Will no one else help her? It really is a hard case; I shall report it to grannie.'

'Well, that is not a bad idea, for she is a favourite with grannie; but I doubt if she will thank you for begging for her—she is very proud.'

'She must not know of our intervention,' said George. 'What do you say to a walk to the Priory this evening?'

'It would be too late after dinner; besides, we should have to take Espérance as third party, you forget propriety and gossip.'

'Hang propriety, you and I ought to be exempted from such a tiresome thing; to-morrow morning, then, by broad daylight,' and he looked up, persuasively.

Bertha coloured.

'Very well, on condition that you do the begging,' she said. George willingly agreed, and the result was so successful that Espérance found a five-pound note added

to her earnings, and given in such a kind and delicate way, that even her sensitive nature could not shrink from the help.

CHAPTER XXII.

'Affliction's sons are brothers in distress,
A brother to relieve how exquisite the bliss.
BURNS.

'POOR Espérance! so your *protégé* is disposed of, Katharine,' said Frances Neville, handing an open letter to her sister.

Lady Worthington read it in much surprise.

'Who would have thought of Dean Collinson coming to the rescue! My opinion of him is raised. But they might have managed to keep him in England. This poor child! what a heart-broken letter it is.'

'I suppose it is really a good thing,' said Frances, sighing. 'But it does seem hard to send him to the ends of the earth, like that.'

'If Henry could only have found something for him, but he is so very just, he would not hear of giving Gaspard de Mabillon the chance of a situation till Julius Wright was settled. There was that capital secretaryship the other day, but he got that for Mr. Frankland, you know.'

'They have been waiting a long time,' said Frances. 'I suppose it is all right.'

'Of course; but still——' and Lady Worthington sighed impatiently. She would have liked to help all the world, in her own way.

Just then Sir Henry came in, not too busy to listen to his wife's story.

'I am sorry we are forestalled,' he said, kindly. 'But it is a capital appointment for him, and Mr. Seymour is a

very pleasant sort of man, I met him at the Deanery once, not so very long ago.'

'Ah, yes,' said Lady Worthington. 'I remember now, it was at that dull dinner which they gave for some Colonial Bishop, while Mrs. Mortlake was at Bournemouth. Mr. Seymour was the little, dark, talkative man, who tried so hard to put a little life into us all.'

Sir Henry smiled at this description.

'He is a kind-hearted man, I should think, and will be a good friend to young De Mabillon.'

'But I do wish we could have helped him, Henry, we have done scarcely anything, and now that he is going out of England there will not be a chance.'

'I will call on Mr. Seymour, and see if we cannot be of some use,' said Sir Henry. 'Perhaps I might take his passage for him, it will be a heavier expense than he can bear, I should think.'

'Oh, that would be delightful,' cried Lady Worthington. 'I daresay the Dean has not thought of it. It would please Espérance, too. Poor child, Claude's picture will not be exaggerated now; I could fancy her with just such a look on her face. I assure you, Henry, I fairly cried over that picture, when I saw it the other day in the Academy.'

'I hope you won't find it depressing in the house,' said Sir Henry, laughing, 'for I bought it yesterday.'

'Really! oh, I am so glad. Claude will be pleased that we should have it, he was always very tender over his "Mariana."'

'It is one of his finest pictures, in my opinion,' said Sir Henry, 'and it has raised him immensely in the public estimation, according to all accounts.'

'Yes, everyone is talking of it. I find it hard work sometimes not to tell the true story of the real "Mariana."

Well, I am very glad we shall have it. Claude must dine with us soon, and we will consult him as to the hanging; I suppose he will wish it to be in the Hall at Worthington.'

And thereupon Lady Worthington became engrossed in another subject, and did not revert again to the De Mabillons. They were not forgotten, however; the next morning Espérance received one of Frances Neville's most comforting letters, and Sir Henry, in spite of a busy day, found time to call on Mr. Seymour.

Meanwhile, Gaspard, in his dreary lodging at Pentonville, was looking forward almost with impatience to the time when he should leave England. To be freed from the life of almost unbearable privation which he had been living so long, to be working for Espérance, seemed to him all that heart could wish; and though he did shrink from leaving her alone in a strange country, this could not mar his happiness, for he was full of plans for the future, in which he was to make a home for her in Ceylon, and end her exile at the Deanery—an exile, the bitterness of which, after all, he little understood.

The practical difficulties of the present were first suggested to him by Espérance's reply to his letter, in which she scouted his notion of getting on with no outfit, and told him of her preparations. Then, when brought face to face with money matters, he began to think of his passage, and resorting to an old Bradshaw was dismayed to find that at the lowest computation it would cost him 40*l.* Such a sum was, of course, utterly beyond his means, and for one miserable day he gave himself up to despair. To lose such a situation seemed impossible—intolerable. Yet what could he do? To ask help of anyone was out of the question. He had, indeed, been reduced to actual begging once, but that had been for Espérance, and

under the conviction that she would die if he did not force himself to do it; in this case she was not so greatly affected, and for himself he could not beg. What he had done for a year he could go on with, he argued with himself. The semi-starvation had not killed him yet, he would struggle on, and wait in the hope that some other work might be found, which would not require such an outlay. Poor Gaspard! how many times that day he arrived at the same conclusion, and how he fought against it!

The privations which he was bearing so patiently seemed unbearable for the future, now that he had had a hope of release. He faced all the trials his poverty had brought him, as he had never allowed himself to do before, and saw all too plainly how much his bodily strength was beginning to fail; he remembered the days of ceaseless toil he had borne during the siege, and thought how a walk of two or three miles would exhaust him now, and loathed the thought. Then he grew angry with himself for not having remembered the expenses of the voyage during his interview with Mr. Seymour, and wondered with a vague misery if his senses were deserting him, as well as his strength, turning sick at the thought of this failing of his powers. What would the end be if he waited much longer? There could be only one answer to that question, and Gaspard could not repress a shudder. He was so young, and clung to life with such ardour; moreover, he was so accustomed to think of death as swift and sudden, and sweetened by patriotism like that of his father, that the idea of this slow, dreary starvation seemed all the more terrible.

He was in the very depths of misery, when his solitude was suddenly invaded. There was a brisk knock at his door, and before his dejected response could have been heard, Claude Magnay entered.

'May I come in?' he asked. 'Your landlady told me you were at home, but there were so many customers below that she allowed Bismarck to show me up.'

Gaspard brightened a little at the sight of his visitor, for he had a great liking for Claude, and during the winter had seen a good deal of him, the only check to their intercourse being that Claude was a little too pressing in his hospitalities, and Gaspard too anxious to elude civilities which he could not return. They were quite intimate enough to discuss Gaspard's present difficulties, and, indeed, Claude's very first remark led to the topic.

'So I hear you are going out to Ceylon next month!'

'Yes—no—at least I was going, but I believe I have changed my mind.'

'Indeed! oh, I am sorry for that. I thought everything was settled; Sir Henry Worthington certainly led me to think so.'

'Sir Henry Worthington! he has had nothing to do with it. It was through Dean Collinson I got the situation.'

'The Worthingtons might have heard of it through your sister, perhaps; certainly Sir Henry mentioned it to me this very day. But you have changed your mind, you say?'

'Yes; I must wait till something turns up in England,' replied Gaspard, trying to stifle a sigh of despair.

'But, my dear fellow, if I may say so, surely it is madness to give up such a chance as this. Coffee-planting is the best thing going now; you will not hear of such an opening every day. Besides, have you not spent this whole year in Mr. Micawber's fashion—waiting for something to turn up?'

Gaspard smiled a little.

'Yes, it is true. But there must be work, you know; I never will believe that I shall not find it in time. If the worst came to the worst, I would swallow my pride and turn into a French waiter!'

'Ah, yes; I can picture you at Gatti's, for instance, with a napkin tucked under your arm, scolding the cook down the lift!' and Claude laughed heartily. Then, suddenly growing grave, 'But, seriously, De Mabillon, this is all very absurd; you must not give up Ceylon.'

'Of course I should not if it could be helped, but it cannot be,' said Gaspard, decisively; 'so help me by considering my other capabilities.'

'Well, first, I hope and think you are capable of confiding to me the reason of this sudden change,' said Claude, quietly.

Gaspard, a little surprised, hesitated a moment, then answered, 'Well, as you can probably guess, the expenses are too great, and I, like a fool, did not think of that at first.'

Claude, who had suspected this, gave an exclamation of relief.

'There! now we have come to the bottom of the matter. Why on earth did you not tell me at once? It shall be arranged as easily as possible. By good luck, too, I have it with me—it will be quite a *coup de théâtre;*' and taking a blue envelope from his pocket he handed it to Gaspard. 'There, De Mabillon, you will do me a great favour by taking that. No—don't open it now. I want to talk to you.'

'This is impossible!' exclaimed Gaspard, disregarding his last words. 'It is very good of you to think of it, but I could not dream of accepting such a sum. Thank you a thousand times for the thought, however.'

'You insist on turning into a waiter?' asked Claude,

laughingly. 'Then I shall make a point of dining every day at your restaurant, and tipping you with threepenny bits.'

Gaspard laughed, but resolutely pushed back the envelope. Claude then began more seriously.

'But, De Mabillon, why will you not accept this? Surely we are sufficiently intimate to be of some use to each other. Why not let me have this pleasure?'

'You are very good, but I cannot accept it. What claim have I on you?'

'Claim! stuff and nonsense; everyone ought to have a claim on everyone, only the world is so eaten up with selfishness and pride that it won't see it.'

'It may be pride in a measure,' said Gaspard, 'but I cannot think it is right to sacrifice one's independence, therefore I must decline your kindness.'

'You aristocrats are terrible people to deal with. Are we not fellow men? Why should you be hard up for fifty pounds, and yet refuse to relieve me of it when I have no use for it? The early Christians got on very well that way, why not you and I?'

'You believe in Socialism, and I do not; I heard too much of it from Lemercier at Paris.'

'I don't understand anything about that nonsense,' said Claude, half impatiently. 'All I know is that things must be very wrong indeed, if one friend can't help another. What's the use of a friend if, directly trouble comes, one must draw back into one's shell of pride, and refuse to take the hand that's offered?'

Gaspard paced up and down the room thinking. Claude's arguments did not at all coincide with the dictates of his pride of independence.

'You see,' he began, after a pause, 'it is not as if this were a matter of necessity. If I were ill or helpless it

might be right to accept it; but I can live as I have lived; there is no immediate——'

'Excuse me,' said Claude, breaking in; 'if I may speak very plainly with you, I think you will own that this mode of living is really killing you by inches. Now I maintain that a man has no more right to do that than to commit suicide outright—when he has the chance of avoiding it, that is. Besides you are not independent, you have your sister to think of. For her sake, at least, if not for your own, you will take this help now, will you not? What right have you to sadden her life by wilfully starving yourself and throwing away this first-rate opportunity in Ceylon?'

Gaspard took four or five turns up and down the room, then stopped abruptly before Claude, his decision made.

'You are right, Magnay; I must think of her. How to thank you for your generosity I do not know. You will not think me ungrateful because I have withstood it so long? You understand, I am sure, how it was, and I do not now yield as to the duty of independence, only, as you say, I believe I am beginning to fail, and I must live to free Espérance. Of course I take this fifty pounds as a loan.'

'No, no,' interposed Claude. 'I'll have no hand in lending and borrowing; a loan is a bad thing to begin life with; but if you like we will make it a bargain, that when you are a thriving coffee-planter and I a spendthrift artist with popularity on the wane, I may throw myself on your mercy, and you will not turn your back on me. Trust me to ask you for a favour when I want it. In the meantime I shall study Socialism; I think it would agree with me.'

Gaspard laughed. 'I wish you could feel the weight you have taken off my shoulders.'

'Charitable wish, certainly,' said Claude.

'Well, the lightness of my heart, then,' said Gaspard. 'I must see Mr. Seymour this very day, and find out about the passage, or I shall not feel that this is really true.'

'Let me know when you sail, and come when you can to my rooms,' said Claude, rising to go, and hurrying himself rather more than usual, as Gaspard began to reiterate his thanks.

The two parted at the door, Gaspard making all speed to Mr. Seymour's rooms in Portland Place, Claude returning to his studio, musing on the specimen of independent pride he had met with, and congratulating himself on his conquest.

He was not yet quit of the subject, however, for he had scarcely been home an hour when there was a hasty ring at his door, and Gaspard, flushed and breathless, was shown up to his room.

'De Mabillon! why this hot pursuit?' asked Claude, with a gesture of feigned despair as he caught sight of his blue envelope. 'If you change your mind again about that ridiculous thing you are only fit for Colney Hatch!'

'No, not about Ceylon,' panted Gaspard. 'But the most extraordinary thing has happened. I went to Mr. Seymour to make arrangements, and, to my astonishment, he has told me that my passage is taken—taken for me, you understand—paid for. Of course I make inquiries, and, after some hesitation, he tells me that it was Sir Henry Worthington who took it, that he wished me not to know—such consideration! Of course I immediately hurried back to you to return the money you lent me with such kindness—you will——'

Claude leant back in his chair and laughed heartily.

'Was ever anything so neatly managed! Three cheers for Sir Henry Worthington! If he had breathed a word

of it to me this morning I should not have caught you so nicely! Was ever the pride of independence so sold! Take it back? No, indeed; I don't unmake bargains so quickly.'

'But indeed, Magnay, I cannot take it now; there is no need; I have no right to it.'

'Don't talk of business in my studio,' said Claude, pretending to take up his palette and brushes. 'It defiles the air. And, jesting apart, De Mabillon, I cannot take this back again. Give me the pleasure of making it really useful to yourself; there must be hundreds of things you want for Ceylon, and when you are there you won't live upon air for the first six months. Besides, you will be wanting to go up to Rilchester before you sail—why not take a week there at the "Spread Eagle"? Confess, now, that you are longing to do so.'

'To see Espérance? Yes, indeed! you should not put such temptations before me.'

'No temptation, but a duty,' said Claude, who saw this was the only way to win his point. 'I should think you culpably neglectful if you did not see your sister first—why, you are her guardian, are you not?'

'Yes, with poor Lemercier. Perhaps I ought to see her, as you say; and it would be hard work to go without. I will then accept your generosity, on the understanding——'

'That I ask a favour at the next opportunity,' interrupted Claude; 'to which I pledge you my word of honour. There! a truce to business. I am going to hear *Don Giovanni* to-night; come with me?'

This, however, Gaspard declined without hesitation, nor would he even accept a proffered cigar; to be under an obligation was to him only bearable, when Espérance was in some way concerned. The two parted with the

greatest cordiality, Gaspard more light-hearted than he had been for months, and feeling that the sense of obligation was not too crushing with so frank and genial a helper; Claude more than ever convinced that life was, and ought to be, thoroughly enjoyable, and heartily glad that he had overcome Gaspard's scruples.

All this time, at the Deanery, Espérance was toiling on, with a fixed resolve not to break down till everything was made ready for Gaspard. Her powers of physical endurance had been well trained in the siege, and she bore pain and fatigue bravely and patiently, only the dull gnawing pain at her heart over-mastered her sometimes. This very evening, which had been so momentous to Gaspard, found her more exhausted than usual. There had been a dinner-party, and it was almost twelve o'clock before she wearily mounted the stairs to her attic-room, her flushed cheeks and weary, yet too brilliant eyes, betraying her fatigue.

The rooms had been very hot and crowded, and the constant standing had left her tired out. Wearily she set down her candle, and throwing open the window, leant out into the cool night air, resting her aching head against the open lattice, and looking very much like Claude's 'Mariana.' She began to count the days; it was the 30th of May, and Gaspard's ship was to sail the second week in June; there was but little time, and her head felt so heavy that she knew she could get on but slowly with the last of the shirts, which she had resolved to finish that night. With a long-drawn sigh she closed the window, and, taking her work, sat down to the table, stitching away at her wristband at first very quickly, but gradually with more and more difficulty. The clock struck one, but she toiled on; then two, but she was only beginning her first button-hole, so that faint glimmerings of dawn were

beginning to show themselves before the shirt was really finished, two candles were burnt down to their sockets, and the poor little worker was almost too tired to cross the room to her bed.

But with rest came no relief to her; indeed, she looked upon this time as the very worst of all, when, her work being done, she had nothing to divert her mind from the coming trouble. She threw herself on her bed, moaning for Gaspard, now that there was no fear of being overheard, and longing—with an almost intolerable longing—for the relief of tears. But Cornelia's stern exhortation seemed to have set up a barrier against these, and nothing would come but long tearless sobs, which hurt instead of relieving her.

So the night wore away, and, after wearily tossing to-and-fro, she fell into a restless sleep just as the sun rose. The morning call roused her before she seemed to have had any rest at all, and, stiff and unrefreshed, she came down to the breakfast table, to the paraphernalia of silver dishes and smoking viands, which was her daily bugbear.

No one but Cornelia noticed how very pale and ill she looked, and Mrs. Mortlake made plans for a morning shopping expedition, in which Espérance was to be her companion. Cornelia tried to interfere.

'No, no, Christabel; I know what your shopping mornings are. Espérance does not look fit for it to-day—why not take Bella?'

'Really, Cornelia, when you leave your vantage ground of book learning, I never met anyone so wanting in common sense. Take poor little delicate Bella for a tiring expedition, when she is only just recovering from that illness! I can't think what would become of a child if you had the management of it. It really is a providence that you are not married.'

'Thank you, I agree with your last remark,' said Cornelia, drily. 'If Bella is not fit, I should advise you to go alone, then.'

'I shall do no such thing. You make the most absurd fuss about Espérance. She is quite well, and only mopes when there is no one to talk to. Don't tell me that any one can chatter away at a party one evening, and set up for an invalid the next day.'

Poor Espérance! The 'chattering' had been such hard work. She gave a little sigh as she heard it brought up against her, but anxious to put an end to the argument, she said in as bright a voice as she could command, 'I think I can go, thank you, Cornelia, don't trouble about it.'

'Oh, well, if you like to be so foolish, you can,' said Cornelia, vexed that Mrs. Mortlake should conquer. 'You know quite well that you would be better at home. However, if you like to spend your morning over dresses and bonnets, I'm sure I don't wish to hinder you.' And she swept out of the room, leaving Espérance to reflect sorrowfully that she had offended the person who had wished to befriend her, and earned the credit of being desirous of that which in reality she most disliked.

But the day was not all to be dark. The last post brought a letter from Gaspard, containing his good news of yesterday, and proposing to come to Rilchester in a week's time, and this was such joy to Espérance that for a little while she forgot her troubles, and grew so lively and cheerful that Cornelia was half inclined to retract her opinion, and agree with Mrs. Mortlake that, after all, Espérance's ill health was only a fancy.

CHAPTER XXIII.

'Les fleurs des champs ne changent pas de place pour rechercher les rayons du soleil. Dieu prend soin de les féconder *là* où elles sont, elles ne se jalousent pas. . . . . Restez où Dieu vous a mis, et portez les fruits qu'il vous demande.'

THE Dean was not pleased when he heard that Gaspard was coming to Rilchester. He had grown accustomed to Espérance's face, and was even in his way rather fond of her, but Gaspard had reminded him painfully of M. de Mabillon, and he shrank from seeing him. Cornelia's proposal of asking him to stay at the Deanery, instead of the hotel, met with approval from no one. The Dean immediately thought of other visitors whom he wished to ask, Mrs. Mortlake talked of house cleaning, and finally, George Palgrave was pressed to prolong his visit, while the other guest-rooms were destined for the wife and daughters of the Bishop of a neighbouring diocese, who were coming to Rilchester for a ball in the following week. There was no particular reason why they should be asked to the Deanery, but Mrs. Mortlake remembered them in a lucky moment, and felt that they would be a more dignified excuse than house cleaning.

Cornelia hated this meanness with her whole soul, and almost shrank from meeting Gaspard after it. This made her seem more stiff and cold than ever, and Espérance, who had relied a good deal upon her cordial behaviour to Gaspard, when she had met him before in London, was dismayed to find her manner so altered.

Mrs. Mortlake, on the contrary, did her very best to be polite when his name was mentioned in Espérance's pre-

sence, and even spoke of driving him back from the station on the day when he was expected; and though the carriage did not appear, still there was courtesy in the suggestion, and, as Mrs. Mortlake remarked afterwards to Cornelia, 'Politeness is worth so much, and costs so little!'

'I don't see any politeness if you don't mean to carry out the suggestion,' said Cornelia, bluntly.

'My dear, you are so literal! Of course I can't really spare the carriage then, the Lowdells must have a drive this afternoon. But it pleased Espérance, and she can quite well imagine that I forgot it.'

'A fine tissue of lies! That child is a great deal too sharp not to find you out. Besides, why can't you be honest?'

'Really, Cornelia, if you employ such offensive words I will not argue with you! "Lies," and "honesty," indeed! I don't know what you mean.'

'I like to call a spade a spade,' said Cornelia, shortly. 'But if you prefer it, what is your object in this politic politeness?'

'Did you not see that Mrs. Lowdell was in the room?' said Mrs. Mortlake. 'You know how observant she is, and Dr. Lowdell is such a particular man, I would not for the world have them guess that we are not perfectly friendly with the De Mabillons. One must be careful, you know, and father is so unguarded.'

'My father is no hypocrite, at least,' said Cornelia, angrily. 'Why did you ask the Lowdells here, if you are so afraid they may guess?—why not have asked Gaspard de Mabillon?'

'The very last thing I wish. Of course we shall show him some slight attention, just to avoid remark, he must dine here to-morrow, but beyond that, I do not at all wish to go.'

Cornelia left the room, out of patience with her sister's contemptible arguments. Passing up the stairs, she found Espérance in the deep window-seat on the landing, busily engaged with paper and pencil. She looked up brightly.

'Only two hundred and ninety-two minutes, and Gaspard will be here, Cornelia, just think!'

'How absurdly childish you are,' said Cornelia, vexed anew. 'If you want to improve your arithmetic, why not master the rule of compound proportion which you were so dull over yesterday?'

Espérance shrugged her shoulders, glanced at the clock to see that now it was only two hundred and ninety minutes, then followed her cousin to her study, and pored for some time over a slate and book, in the vain endeavour to find an answer to the question—'If 240*l.* be paid for bread for 49 persons for 20 mo., when wheat is 48*s.* a qr.; how long will 234*l.* find bread for 91 persons, when wheat is at 2*l.* 16*s.* a qr.?'

But her head was far too painful just then for the solving of such a problem, and she multiplied and divided with a vagueness attended by unhappy results, in which the ninety-one persons existed for forty months instead of two, and when Cornelia, in despair, showed her the absurdity of this answer, she would only reply that perhaps it was in time of siege. The idea of such a frivolous suggestion so angered Cornelia, that she summarily dismissed her unpromising pupil, feeling that all the world was going contrary to her that morning.

Espérance, in spite of her aching head, hurried off to the station in the very hottest part of the afternoon, her heart bounding at the thought of seeing Gaspard once more, and far too happy to think of being vexed with Mrs. Mortlake, for having 'forgotten' the carriage.

That was a rapturous meeting! Happier than the

last in many ways, for Espérance received no great shock as she had then done from Gaspard's appearance, being fully prepared for it. Nor was he at all aware how very far from well she was, for her excitement and happiness had brought colour to her cheeks, and given her temporary strength, so that the only change he noticed was in her hair.

'Your mane is gone, then?' he asked, regretfully.

Espérance laughed.

'Yes, quite gone; if you very much wish, though, you might perhaps see it once more, I believe it is hanging up in the window.'

'You have cut it off!' exclaimed Gaspard, dismayed.

'You masculine mind! yes, indeed, how else did you think I had disposed of it? it brought me five guineas.'

'And you sold it for that wretched outfit of mine! *Chérie,* I don't know how to forgive you. I wondered where you could have found the money for those garments you spoke of. You are like the girl in the fairy tale, who wove shirts of her own hair for her eleven brothers.'

'No, she wove stinging nettles,' said Espérance, 'which I would not promise to do even for you. Now do not begin to scold again about my cropped hair. I only told you because I was afraid you would talk of it at the Deanery.'

'Very well, it shall be as you wish, you are a wonderful little sister. But I wish we had known before of all the help that would come, I am afraid you have been tiring yourself with these preparations.'

'Do you think I would have let others do everything for you, and sat contentedly doing nothing! But how good it was of Claude Magnay to help you.'

'Yes, he was most kind, most generous—I could not

have borne it from everyone, but his manner of doing it was perfect. It will make a wonderful difference to us, and I shall be able to leave you something in hand when I go, besides being able to get on comfortably in my first six months in Ceylon.'

'Yes, I could not have borne to think of your starving yourself over there, when you would have hard work, too. And I am so glad Sir Henry Worthington was so kind. When did you see him?'

'Last week, the day I wrote to you. He was more kind and considerate than I can tell you, and Lady Worthington, too; I am glad you know and like them, I shall feel happier about you.'

Espérance turned a little pale at the reference to their parting, and made haste to change the conversation.

'See, that is the "Spread Eagle" on the left-hand side of the street, though why, among all the hotels, you should have chosen the one bearing the Prussian emblem, I can't think.'

Gaspard laughed. ''Tis the only decent one according to Claude Magnay. Are those bells ringing for service?'

'Yes, will you come? I want you to see everyone. You can speak to them afterwards.'

Gaspard consented, and Espérance led the way to the Cathedral, but she was disappointed to find Cornelia the only occupant of the Deanery pew. George Palgrave and Bertha had walked over to the Priory, and Mrs. Mortlake had chosen to prolong her drive that afternoon.

The service over, Cornelia in spite of her shrinking from the meeting hastened after her two cousins, overtaking them just as they reached the door, and greeting Gaspard as warmly as she could, though as she was almost ashamed to look at him, he could not think her anything but cold and forbidding.

'You will bring your brother home, will you not?' she said, turning to Espérance.

There was no great profession of eagerness to see him, and she could not bring herself to express any regrets that the Deanery was too full for them to take him in. For a minute Gaspard was almost inclined to give an excuse, this cold hospitality seemed to him worse than nothing. However, Espérance seemed greatly pleased, and understood better what it meant from Cornelia, so the three walked back together, and by degrees Cornelia thawed, forgot her shame and the awkwardness of her position, and began to feel and to show more interest in Gaspard.

Espérance was delighted to see her being thus won over. They sat in the purple drawing-room, and she watched Gaspard who looked delightfully incongruous in one of the ponderous arm-chairs, and listened contentedly to the conversation going on, perfectly happy as long as she was close by him.

Then some of the Miss Lowdells came in, and tea was brought up, while Cornelia became more and more engrossed with Gaspard, and Espérance was called upon to give Miss Grace Lowdell a full account of the battle in which he had earned his scar. This was delightful—she had scarcely hoped to make others appreciate her hero!

At last Mrs. Mortlake returned, and entering the room, wholly unprepared, could not help starting with surprise and vexation when she caught sight of the thin, olive-complexioned, moustached stranger, who seemed quite established in the house, and was handing about cups of tea with a sort of careless ease which annoyed her.

Espérance saw the start of dismay and could not help being amused by it, particularly when it was quickly fol-

lowed by a prompt show of politeness, and a 'charming' smile.

'M. de Mabillon! I am delighted to see you! I was beginning to think there was a fate against our meeting. I was so sorry to miss you last month in London, but my little girl was claiming all my attention just then. You are well, I hope?'

In spite of the silky voice, and the well-regulated smiles, Gaspard was by no means deceived, he remembered Claude's guarded description of the 'would-be charming lady, whom it was hard to trust,' and instinctively felt a shrinking from her kindness. His antipathy was confirmed when, in a pause in his conversation with Cornelia, he overheard a low-toned remark from Mrs. Mortlake to his sister, not intended, of course, for other ears.

'Your usual want of thought! you might have seen we should want another cup. Just ring at once.'

It was one of the difficulties of Espérance's situation that her duties were so undefined, she could never find out what was or what was not expected of her, and was constantly being brought to task, either for neglect or for forwardness and meddling.

To hear her scolded was so new, however, to Gaspard, that he even magnified Mrs. Mortlake's offence. Her words were not so very severe after all, but her look and tone angered him, and hastily crossing the room, he intercepted Espérance on her way to the bell.

'Do not trouble, *chérie*, sit down. Allow me, Mrs. Mortlake,'—thereby revealing that he had heard everything.

Mrs. Mortlake was vexed. She had wished to keep up appearances, she was anxious that Gaspard should think well of her, and now he had overheard her speaking crossly and had humiliated her before Espérance. She hated him, but strove to recover her place in his estimation.

'You gentlemen spoil us nowadays,' she said, smiling graciously. 'This is such a household of women, though, that we are used to waiting on ourselves.'

'Oh, indeed!' said Gaspard, gravely.

She detected sarcasm in his voice, and winced; then thinking that a little flattery might be of use, she continued more hopefully, 'And Espérance is such a help to us—such a very great help, we should miss her so much. I cannot tell you how I, in particular, should miss her.'

'It is very good of you, I am sure,' said Gaspard, in that grave manner which made Mrs. Mortlake so uncomfortable. Of all things she detested irony the most, and there was, besides, an angry light in the clear, brown eyes confronting her, which baffled her even more. She would not give up, however, without one more attempt to win his good opinion.

'I am so vexed that we cannot give you a room here, it seems so very uncousinly, but I am sure you will understand how it is. It just happens to be one of our full times, otherwise we should have been most happy to have had you with us.'

There was something so very snake-like in her manner, that Gaspard could not believe a word of this; he turned with relief to Cornelia's straightforward coldness.

'I am very sorry, too,' she said, gravely; 'but I hope it will not prevent your seeing as much of Espérance. You must come in here whenever you like, my study shall be quite at your disposal.'

Gaspard thanked her warmly, and rose to go. Mrs. Mortlake, in despair, sent off her last arrow.

'Yes, pray come in as often as you like, and you will, I hope, dine with us to-morrow, we shall be delighted to see you.'

'Thank you, I shall be very happy to come,' and Mrs. Mortlake tried not to look up, but felt once more the searching look from those keen eyes. Espérance watched with amusement, while Gaspard shook hands quite *à l'Anglaise*, and followed him into the hall for a few last words.

To her surprise, the door was scarcely shut before he caught her in his arms, kissing her again and again.

'*Chérie*, you should have told me before! Does that woman always treat you so?'

'How?' asked Espérance, surprised. 'Mrs. Mortlake, do you mean? She was only a little cross. What do I care, now that I have you?'

'And you never told me what you had to put up with!' said Gaspard, reproachfully. 'It is a hard world, Espérance, very hard.'

'But happy for this one week,' she said, smiling. 'This must be our Carnival. How I do bless Mr. Magnay for sending you here! There is plenty of happiness in the world, after all, and kindness also. Cornelia was nice, too, this afternoon.'

'Yes, we will take advantage of her study, I think. I shall come to-morrow morning.'

'To-morrow, yes, how we shall talk! and, Gaspard, do not forget to send round all your socks, I must have a grand darning.'

'You forget my new outfit.'

'No, but for the voyage, you extravagant boy; now don't forget, as early as you can this evening. There! I must go, someone is calling.'

'Bother them!' said Gaspard, impatiently. 'I won't have you run off your legs, you are as tired as you can be.'

She let her head rest on his shoulder just for a minute,

then, as the call came again more impatiently, she started up.

'I must go. Enough treats for one day! Good-bye, *mon ami*, and promise me to have a good dinner at the "Spread Eagle."'

She hurried away, and was greeted by expostulations on her slowness, in a voice which Gaspard did not recognise, but which he fancied must belong to Mrs. Mortlake. As the speaker passed along the gallery, he could not avoid hearing the words, 'If you don't know how to behave in other people's houses, you must be taught. No, don't quote Cornelia to me. While the house is full of visitors——'

He did not stay for more, but snatched up his hat and strode out of the house, slamming the door after him. To hear Espérance—his Espérance—spoken to in that way! It was maddening—intolerable! This terrible, oppressive dependence—what was it not costing her? How could he bear to leave her in such a place, to be coldly treated, snubbed, scolded! This week of his so-called 'Carnival' was too full of revelations to him to be a happy one.

He walked back to his hotel in fierce anger, vowing impossible vengeance upon Mrs. Mortlake; but by degrees he grew more rational, and consoled himself by thinking of the time when he should be able to release Espérance, and bring her to a new home in Ceylon.

Later in the evening his mind was set at rest by one more sight of her; according to his promise, he carried to the Deanery the work that was to keep her hands full during the coming week, and she, being on the watch for him, ran to the door to take it herself. She was looking so quiet and serene that he could not allude to what was in his mind, and though she would only let him stay for half a minute, even that brief sight was enough to check

his angry thoughts, and made him feel ashamed of his impatience. She was bearing all in the right way, of that he felt sure; she was patient for herself—and he would strive to be patient for her.

So he walked on, through the old gateways, and past the grey-gabled houses, listening to the swifts and jackdaws as they flew noisily about their homes in the Cathedral towers, and gradually peace came to him, while something brought back to his memory the lines of an old French hymn, the words of which seemed to fit themselves to the bird's song—

'Comment apprendre
A bien entendre
Ce qu'aujourd'hui nous ignorons?
Dans ta maison, nous saurons tout comprendre:
Toi qui nous vois, nous te verrons!'

'*Nous saurons tout comprendre!*' There was comfort in that. He thought of his mother's sorrows, of his father's troubled life and death agony, of his own home in the hands of strangers, and of this humbling dependence on others in a foreign country, mysteries hard to bear and impossible to understand, but to be understood then, and each and all ordered with a special end.

And Espérance, too, as she sat that night in her room, over her weary task, was strengthened by that very same thought which Frances Neville had first given to her months ago. Was not this present pain, and weariness, and separation, the fulfilling of that Will which is always best—to be taken on trust till the time came for 'reading the mystery right.'

Those night vigils, though they taxed her strength to the utmost, were by no means comfortless, and this particular evening she was full of the happiness of

Gaspard's visit, and the prospect of the week to be spent with him.

Of darning and piecing there was indeed enough. The parcel of clothes proved to be in a sorry condition, and Espérance, having spread them over her table till the room looked like 'rag fair,' proceeded to divide them into three classes, 'hopeless,' 'possible,' and 'good.' Among the 'good' she placed the less ragged garments, and the socks in which the holes were not more than an inch or so in diameter, and then set bravely to work, nor stopped once in spite of her growing weariness till much of the tattered raiment was made wearable again, and the crowing of the cocks, and the red glow of sunrise, told her that she must make haste to bed if she were to have any sleep at all.

But this was to be the last of her nights of work, for the next morning Mrs. Mortlake called her aside, and in the voice of cold displeasure, which she disliked more than anything, asked, 'Pray, what were you doing last night?'

'Nothing, Christabel,' she answered, innocently. 'Nothing particular, that is, part of the time I played *bézique* with George.'

'Don't evade my question in that way, I said last night, you know quite well what I mean.' Espérance started, and looked a little vexed. 'Ah! now you are fairly caught. I shall hear at once, please, what is the meaning of this? Do you think I shall allow candles to be wasted in this way? I hear that you burn one every night down to the very socket. I will have no more novel reading at night, so you had better understand at once. What were you doing?'

'I had some needlework to finish, and sat up with it. I am sorry about the candles, Christabel.'

'Sorry, indeed! I daresay; and what was the all important work, pray? One of your dainty little vanities, I suppose?'

Espérance drew herself up.

'I don't see that it is any concern of yours. It was work which had to be done.'

'No doubt, in your opinion, but I should like to hear what it was, please, we have had enough shuffling.'

'There has been no shuffling at all,' broke in Espérance, passionately, 'and I don't see that you have any right to question me like this. I won't allow that you have, but because I choose, I will tell you that the work was for Gaspard.'

'Indeed! it was very amiable of you to work for him at the expense of others.'

'I don't believe for a moment that uncle would grudge me a few candles,' said Espérance, half scornfully. 'But as you seem to think he would, of course I will not sit up again.'

'Spare yourself needless protestations,' said Mrs. Mortlake. 'You will not have another opportunity.'

Just then one of the Miss Lowdells came in, and Mrs. Mortlake was immediately all smiles and graciousness, while Espérance hurried out of the room, wondering what her cousin meant by this last speech, and full of indignation at her meanness and injustice.

The Cathedral service quieted her, however, and she resolved that Gaspard should hear nothing of it. She knew quite well that many of the disagreeables of her life could not be concealed from him, but whenever it was possible to throw a veil over her petty sufferings, she would do so. The day, in consequence, passed happily and satisfactorily, and in spite of Mrs. Mortlake's interruptions Espérance saw a great deal of Gaspard, thanks

to the privacy of Cornelia's study. The evening, too, went well, and though the Dean evidently disliked Gaspard, yet he was quite civil, and George Palgrave good-naturedly threw himself into the breach, and managed to keep his uncle in a good humour when the ladies had left the dinner-table. Later on, in the drawing-room, Cornelia tried to make up for the family coldness by drawing Gaspard out as to his prospects in Ceylon, and making many really kind-hearted inquiries about his previous life, and so far succeeded that he learnt really to like her, and felt less unhappy in leaving Espérance at the Deanery.

Cornelia's heart had been touched. Ever since the day when travelling back from London she had witnessed Espérance's passion of love and sorrow, she had been softened, had loved her little cousin, and taken a real interest in something outside the walls of her study. Harsh and sarcastic as she still often seemed, she was really anxious to do what was kind and right; from the first her dislike of Espérance had never descended to meanness like Mrs. Mortlake's, and now her goodwill was real and hearty, though her natural reserve gave her when she least wished it an appearance of coldness.

Mrs. Mortlake, as she came to bid her sister good-night, unwarily alluded to the incident of the candles, whereupon Cornelia was at once up in arms.

'You mean to say you had the stinginess to grudge them to her?'

'My dear, it is not so much the expense I mind, but think what a bad habit for a girl of seventeen to sit up night after night. No doubt she often dropped asleep over her work, it is a wonder we have not had the house burnt down, I'm sure.'

'You are very prudent, certainly,' said Cornelia, with a

sarcastic smile; 'and how does she mean to finish Gaspard's outfit?'

'How should I know,' replied Mrs. Mortlake, with affected carelessness; 'she will not finish it by candle-light, that is all I care about.'

'So it seems. Well, she shall at least have the opportunity of finishing it by lamp-light,' said Cornelia, majestically.

Mrs. Mortlake gave an inarticulate sound of annoyance, but Cornelia, with a cold good-night, took her little reading lamp in her hand, and mounted the stairs to the attics without another word of explanation.

To her surprise she found Espérance already in bed.

'Oh, I am just too late,' she said regretfully. 'I thought, perhaps, you would like my lamp to work by. Christabel has just been telling me about this absurd fuss.'

Espérance looked up with gratitude in her tired eyes.

'How kind of you to think of it, I was wondering how I could get Gaspard's things done in time, I meant to get up early.'

'That would be better for you than sitting up,' said Cornelia; 'indeed you do not look fit for anything to-night.' And she looked with some anxiety at Espérance's flushed cheeks, and the purple rings round her eyes. 'How much more have you to do?'

Espérance pointed to a formidable pile of work on her table, and Cornelia scrutinised the unsightly holes with an unpractised eye, and wondered if any skill could really mend them.

'I almost wish I knew how to darn,' she said, thoughtfully. 'There must be more here than you will get through.'

'No, not if I wake in time,' said Espérance confidently.

'I will fetch you my alarum,' said Cornelia, and she hurried away, returning in a few minutes with a little French alarum clock. 'What time shall I set it for?'

'Four o'clock, please, the sun will have risen then,' said Espérance, watching her cousin's movements with languid interest.

'What! four hours work before breakfast! must you really have so long?' exclaimed Cornelia.

'It is what I have always taken,' said Espérance. 'The time goes so quickly when one works, you know.'

Cornelia did not know, for she rarely touched a needle, but she was a good deal shocked when she heard of the length of those nightly vigils, and touched by the thought of the love which had prompted them.

'My dear,' she said gently, 'you will promise me not to sit up again; get up to-morrow morning if you like, and I will try to prevent your being interrupted in the day, you can work in my study, you know.'

There was something almost laughable in the thought of Cornelia's sanctum being turned into a workroom, but Espérance's gratitude knew no bounds. She was so much pleased and surprised that her English deserted her, and throwing her arms round Cornelia's neck she exclaimed—'*Ma bien chère!* but you are good, but you are thoughtful—how can I thank you enough! How happy you have made me!'

It was a rhapsody, no doubt, but in spite of its Frenchness it went straight to Cornelia's heart. As she left the room her father's voice was heard calling her from the observatory, the door of which stood opposite to Espérance's.

'My dear, just read this foot-note to me, will you, the print is too small for me.'

She took the book, but was obliged to brush her hand

hastily across her eyes before beginning to read—for incredible though it seemed to her, they were dim with tears.

CHAPTER XXIV.

> 'Life I repeat, is energy of love,
> Divine or human; exercised in pain,
> In strife and tribulation, and ordained,
> If so approved and sanctified, to pass
> Through shades and silent rest, to endless joy.'
>
> WORDSWORTH.

THE days passed by with terrible swiftness, and when the Sunday was over, Espérance found it hard to make the most of her present happiness, her thoughts would turn to that parting which was in store for her on the Wednesday. Gaspard had arranged to meet Mr. Seymour in town on Wednesday evening, and they were to travel down to Southampton together, their ship sailing the next day.

Unfortunately, Tuesday was the evening of the Militia ball, and Espérance foresaw a time of hurry and bustle, when she would most have wished for quiet. Sorrow was making her very patient, however, and though she was bent upon finishing Gaspard's mending in time to pack for him that afternoon, she bore her ceaseless interruptions quietly.

Never had Cornelia's room been invaded so ruthlessly. First, Bertha appeared, with her cheeks flushed rosy red, and a happy light in her usually languid eyes.

'Espérance, you must help me just for a moment. See! George has given me these beautiful pink azaleas for to-night, so I must wear my white net instead of the blue, and here is the kilting all in ribbons.'

Espérance looked in dismay at the torn skirt, which had been very roughly treated at some dance.

'No one will mend it so beautifully as you,' said Bertha, persuasively, 'and, indeed, all the servants are so busy this morning; can you spare just half-an-hour for it?'

Espérance could not refuse; she put down Gaspard's sock with a stifled sigh, and submitted to being half smothered by the folds of white net. Her dainty little fingers soon set matters right, and as she worked she could not help wondering when the very obvious attachment between George Palgrave and Bertha would be declared. Perhaps it might be that very night; Bertha would look very beautiful in the white dress and the azaleas, and there would be music, and bright lights, and excitement. Ah, well! it was a good thing that some people could enjoy such things, and the little French girl knew well enough that they were enjoyable, but she was too ill and sorrowful even to wish for 'distraction' just now.

She had just finished Bertha's dress when Mrs. Mortlake came in.

'You are always out of the way when you are wanted,' she said, crossly, 'The idea of shutting yourself up here when everyone is so busy! I want you to come and see to Bella.'

Espérance folded up her work with a heavy heart, and hastened away to the drawing-room, where she found Bella making herself a general nuisance.

'There, just hear her reading, will you,' said Mrs. Mortlake, handing over her troublesome charge willingly enough. 'She must be here because the other rooms are engaged, keep her quiet.'

This was more easily said than done, as Bella was in high spirits, and much more inclined to torment good-natured Mrs. Lowdell, with rough, teasing play, than to attend to her lessons. For at least half-an-hour such a battle as the following went on:—

'Now, Bella, c—a—t, you know quite well what it spells!'

'C—a—t,' droned Bella, stupidly. 'The light is in my eyes, cousin.'

'Then move, now then.'

'C—a——what is Miss Lowdell singing for?'

'Don't talk, go *on*.'

'C—a—t—Oh! there's a wasp on the window.'

'Bella, go on.'

'Will you give me a chocolate if I say it right?'

'No, certainly not; now, quickly.'

'Mamma always does,' said Bella, with an ominous drooping at the corners of her mouth.

'Are you going to read this word or not?'

'No, you're only French, and you don't know a bit how to teach me,' whined Bella.

Whereupon Espérance shut the book and carried her provoking little pupil to the corner, where she roared with all her might.

'A very difficult child to manage, I should think,' said Mrs. Lowdell, with a commiserating glance, as she hastily left the room to be out of the sound of Bella's screams.

Espérance, heartily ashamed that her pupil should be driving people away by her naughtiness, longed to take her up to the nursery; but this was against Mrs. Mortlake's rules, and Miss Bella's two hours downstairs were apt to make visitors beat a hasty retreat to their bedrooms.

She screamed on without the smallest *diminuendo* for some minutes, and Espérance sat down despairingly with her hands clasped over her forehead, half distracted by the double noise of crying and singing.

On and on it went like some frightful nightmare.

'"But men must work and women must weep"'—from Miss Lowdell.

Roar, roar—from Bella.

'"Though storms be sudden, and waters deep."'

'Ooh, hoo! ooh, hoo! I hate you!'—from the corner.

Why must people sing those frightful sea-songs, on this day, of all others? And, oh! why would Bella scream so unmercifully? The physical and mental pain together were almost maddening.

Just as Miss Lowdell left the drawing-room, Mrs. Mortlake came back, vexed at hearing Bella's screams.

'What is the matter? Things always go wrong if I leave the room for a minute. Come to me, my precious, what is it then?'

Bella could not speak for sobbing, but by degrees Mrs. Mortlake caught the words, 'I hate her,' and 'chocolate,' intermixed with the howling.

'You always do manage to irritate the poor child, Espérance; of course she may have some chocolate if she likes. You really are most provoking, she has been as good as possible with me, and now you have upset her. Why was she in the corner?'

'She was very inattentive and rude,' said poor Espérance, looking down.

'Rude, indeed! it is your ridiculous pride which is so ready to take offence, she is never rude to any one else, and I'm not going to have your French system of punishments brought in, so please remember, no one punishes Bella but myself. Nothing tends more to make a child deceitful than constant punishment, your national characteristic is quite accounted for.'

Then, as Espérance would have begun an indignant remonstrance.

'No, no, I will not have arguing before Bella, you have wasted quite enough of my time already; the best thing you can do now is to leave the room, for the child

can't bear the sight of you. I wish instead of sitting up at night burning other people's candles you would learn to make yourself useful by day. You think so much of French manners, but for my part——'

Mrs. Mortlake broke off in dismay, for looking round she saw Gaspard standing in the doorway, and from the expression of his face, she knew he must have heard most of her angry speech.

Espérance turned too, and with a cry of relief ran to him.

'Gaspard! Gaspard!' and she clung to him as if for protection.

He put his arm round her, holding her closely, deaf to all Mrs. Mortlake's greetings, and only growing more and more angry as he felt how Espérance was trembling. As soon as he could trust himself to speak he turned upon Mrs. Mortlake, but Christabel with an instinctive dread of what was coming, tried to intercept his speech.

'Good-morning, you are later than usual to-day; have you come to take Espérance for a walk?'

Her cool, clear voice so angered him that he dared not speak to her. He just bowed an assent.

Christabel fairly trembled before that calm, dignified anger, and she never forgot Gaspard's look, the clear, unflinching eyes, the proud, sensitive mouth, and the whole face rigid with repressed indignation. She gave a sigh of relief when he turned away, and led Espérance from the room.

When they had reached Cornelia's study, however, Espérance had recovered herself; and, indeed, though unable to help a feeling of relief in having Gaspard for a protector, she was very sorry that he had heard one of Mrs. Mortlake's scoldings, and tired out as she was she roused herself, trying to talk lightly of the morning's occurrences, and to laugh him out of his anger.

'You see, *mon ami*, it is a busy day, people can't help being a little cross, there is to be a ball to-night, you know.'

'It was not crossness, it was downright insolence,' said Gaspard, angrily. 'You may be patient for yourself, *mon cœur*, but I can't be patient for you. It is unbearable to think of leaving you with such people.'

She stooped down and kissed his forehead.

'I think it can be borne, when we believe that in three or four years it may perhaps be all over.'

'Three or four years! yes. But till then?'

Espérance could not answer; she turned away to hide her quivering lips, till Gaspard, ashamed of his despondency, hurriedly rose and drew her towards him once more.

'*Chérie*, I have been a wretch, you who have the heaviest burden to bear are preaching courage to me. We must, we will endure, darling, and the waiting may not be so hard as we think.'

Espérance was soon at work again, in spite of Gaspard's entreaties that she would spare herself.

'And by-the-by,' he said, suddenly, 'what did Mrs. Mortlake mean by that reference to the burning of candles?'

'I am sorry you heard that,' said Espérance, colouring. It was only that I used to sit up sometimes at night, and she thought it extravagant, and was vexed.'

'You sat up over my outfit? You naughty child, that accounts for your white cheeks, and you mean that that woman grudged you the candles?'

'Yes, she puts little half-hour candles in my room now,' said Espérance, laughing at Gaspard's indignant scorn.

'I only wish she were a man, and that I could have it

out with her,' he said between his teeth. 'But there, we will not waste any more of our time over such a disagreeable subject.'

By the afternoon, most of Gaspard's things were ready, and Espérance was much relieved at receiving from Cornelia a dispensation from the Cathedral service, so that she had time to pack for him. This seemed to make her realise things much more fully, and she began to feel that she could not keep up much longer.

Very sorrowfully she walked back through the Close and the Vicar's Court, glad enough to have Gaspard's arm. He was to dine at the Deanery that evening, Cornelia having taken pains to persuade her father to give the invitation; but to tell the truth though Espérance was glad he had been invited, she could not enjoy his presence very much, for she was on thorns the whole time, lest he should speak his mind to Mrs. Mortlake, or offend the Dean still further by rashly venturing on hazardous subjects.

She trembled, indeed, when at dinner he alluded to the Tichborne Case, for it was a very sore point, and the cause of frequent and angry arguments between the Dean and George Palgrave, George believing firmly in the Claimant, while the Dean was furious if anyone doubted that he was Arthur Orton. However, luckily Gaspard could for once agree with the Dean, and George was much too good tempered that day to mind being argued down, so that the peace was kept.

The evening was uncomfortable and disturbed; first there was some music, and Espérance was wanted to play accompaniments, and then just as she hoped for a little time with Gaspard, Grace Lowdell came up with a beseeching face—the maid was helping her mother to dress for the ball, would Espérance spare her just a few

minutes, her French fingers would be so invaluable, and there was no getting on alone.

Of course she was obliged to go; and after Grace Lowdell came her elder sister, and her younger sister, and Bertha with her pink azaleas, far too happy and excited to remember that they were taking up the very last evening of Gaspard's visit.

Espérance would almost have forsworn her nationality, so dearly did she pay that night for it. Just before ten o'clock she went to Cornelia's room to offer her help, but she found her cousin already dressed, looking for once really handsome, in black velvet and some very fine old lace. She was standing by a reading-desk, poring over a yellow-leaved volume, her white gloves suffering considerably from the dust accumulated on its cover.

'Is there anything I can do to help you, Cornelia?' asked Espérance, in her tired voice.

'No, I am ready, thank you. I hoped you were with your brother, Christabel has not been hindering you, has she?'

'There were several things to do; but we shall have a little time after you are gone,' said Espérance.

'Very well, go to my study then, and you will not be interrupted. Ah! I hear the carriage,' and Cornelia reluctantly closed her book, and took off her spectacles.

Espérance followed her downstairs to the hall, where she found Gaspard, with frigid politeness, helping Mrs. Mortlake with her cloak. Cornelia counted heads in a business-like way, and marshalled her guests into the carriages, walking about majestically with her velvet dress tucked up, and bestowing scornful pity on the younger ladies with their trains of tarlatan and net. After some trouble, Espérance gathered up the last of the dresses, and

the party set off, Bertha turning back once more to wish her cousins good-night.

'I wish you were coming too,' she said, unable to understand that Espérance would far rather be at home with Gaspard.

George Palgrave came up, however, before there was time for more, and she took his arm and hurried down the steps looking radiantly happy.

The footman closed the front door, and then turned to Espérance.

'If you please, miss, the Dean wished me to tell you that he is engaged in watching an eclipse of the moon, and there will be no family prayers to-night.'

Gaspard stroked his moustache to hide a smile.

'Well, *chérie*, where shall we go? I must have a few minutes with you.'

Espérance led the way to Cornelia's study, but when the door was shut, her strength all at once deserted her, she turned suddenly faint and giddy, and clung sobbing to Gaspard.

'*Bien-aimée!* what is it? You are ill, *mon cœur*.'

'I—I don't know,' she sobbed. 'Oh, I wish it would all stop, I am so tired!'

Her ears were ringing with the words of Miss Lowdell's song:—

> 'For men must work, and women must weep,
> And the sooner 'tis over, the sooner to sleep.'

Gaspard did not quite understand her, but he saw that she was quite worn out.

'You are tired, darling, and overdone,' he said, gently. 'There, come to your old place, and be a baby once more.' He took her on his knee, and made her rest her head on his shoulder; but the quivering, tearless sobs alarmed him.

'Where are your tears gone to, *chérie*—you used to have no lack?'

She tried to smile, and remembering that he knew nothing of Cornelia's former sternness made an effort to check her sobs. He had found out too many of her troubles already, and she was determined that he should go away well satisfied with Cornelia.

'I am better,' she faltered, still struggling bravely to conquer herself; and Gaspard, relieved, did not question her further, but began to talk of other things.

There were still many matters to be discussed, and on this last evening they both instinctively dwelt on old times, and talked over their recollections of home. The hours passed by unheeded, and Gaspard was first roused to look at the clock by finding that, in a brief silence, Espérance had fallen asleep. It was long past twelve, but he could not bear to disturb her, and sat on, not at all sorry for an excuse for not leaving her. He was very uneasy now about going away. Espérance seemed to him thoroughly out of health, and unfit to be left in this forlorn, motherless household. He felt a little bitter as he remembered that these most unfeminine cousins were her only relations, and as he watched her flushed cheeks, and quick, uneasy breathing, longed more than he had ever longed before for his mother.

As he recalled the dim vision of tender gentleness and love, treasured up among his childish memories, he might perhaps be forgiven for uttering one passionate invective against the Dean, and the unrelenting hardness which had so preyed upon his mother's life.

The clock had just struck one, when he was startled by approaching footsteps, and the door was opened by Cornelia. She was of course surprised to find her cousin still up. Gaspard made a low-toned explanation, and Cornelia, touched by the very unwonted sight before her, was unusually gracious.

'One of the Miss Lowdells turned faint, and I came home early with her. I am sorry you and Espérance had an interrupted evening.'

'I am afraid she is over-tired, she has been slaving over my outfit,' said Gaspard, anxiously. 'I wish I could have left her better. You will know, Miss Collinson, surely she is very hot and feverish? I wish I knew what was wrong with her.'

Cornelia felt her hand in a hesitating way, painfully conscious of her own ignorance.

'I know nothing about illness,' she said, 'but certainly she is very hot. I think, as you say, she has over-tired herself.'

Gaspard's face only grew more troubled, and Cornelia would have given worlds for that womanly skill and wisdom which she felt the need of so much. Their voices were making Espérance restless, she moved her arms uneasily, and talked in her sleep, at first unintelligibly, but afterwards with terrible distinctness, though always in French. Cornelia and Gaspard each received some wounds from the unconscious tongue. Now it was in relation to Gaspard's journey.

'To-morrow, to-morrow! How shall I bear it! And yet it will be good for you, Gaspard.'

Then again, with little convulsive sobs between the words. 'It is so far away, so very far, and I am so lonely. If only they would love me a little!'

By degrees she grew a little more quiet, and Gaspard looked up at Cornelia, great tears in his eyes.

'Miss Collinson,' he said, earnestly, 'she is all I have left, you will take care of her?'

'Indeed, I will,' said Cornelia with real sympathy, and Gaspard trusted those three words, more than he would have done countless protestations from Mrs. Mortlake. He

turned once more to his sister, while Cornelia watched them sadly, yet with a sort of envy.

At last Espérance woke, wearied and confused, and Gaspard proposed that she should go up to her room.

'Yes, come,' urged Cornelia, 'you will never rest down here, I will help you.'

She lighted a candle, and would have offered to help her up the stairs, but Gaspard was before her.

'Now, *chérie*, hold tight round my neck, and you shall feel as if you were going up the old *pigeonnier* at home.'

Espérance obeyed, and was carried upstairs in his arms, Cornelia staying to see her safely into bed.

The next morning dawned brightly, too brightly for poor Espérance. It reminded her of that fatal 30th of November, when the sun had shone down so cruelly upon their desolation. She was too much worn out now, to feel more than a dull, aching pain at her heart, as she remembered what day it was; she dressed wearily and went down to the breakfast-room, with only one idea strongly impressed on her mind—that for Gaspard's sake she must keep up.

As if in a dream, she went through the usual routine, walked to the Cathedral, meeting Gaspard at the door, stood, sat, and knelt mechanically through the service, went back to the Deanery, and talked with Gaspard still dreamily, in Cornelia's room. At lunch she was pale and quiet; only when in the afternoon the time for Gaspard's departure really came, and the omnibus drove up with his luggage, a glow of intense colour rose to her cheeks, and the composure which all the morning had been her aid forsook her. She could hardly see or stand, but true to her resolution she struggled on, talking still, though she could scarcely hear her voice because of a strange ringing in her ears.

Gaspard was much more visibly agitated. He hurried through his good-byes in the drawing-room, and came out into the hall where Espérance and Cornelia were waiting, looking so haggard and miserable that Cornelia's heart ached for him.

The sight seemed to give new courage to Espérance, she clung to him with whispered words of hope and comfort, and soft caresses. He turned for one moment to Cornelia.

'Your promise—you will remember?'

'Yes, always,' replied Cornelia earnestly, pressing his hand.

Then, with one long embrace, the brother and sister parted, and Gaspard with bowed head passed down the steps, and gave directions to the driver in French.

Espérance with a great effort still stood at the door; the floor seemed rocking beneath her, a black mist was gathering before her eyes, but she smiled and waved her hand bravely. Gaspard looked back relieved, and when the omnibus turned the corner of the Vicar's Court, he saw her standing on the steps still watching him, while Cornelia had come forward too, and was holding her hand.

The sound of the wheels died away in the quiet court, and Cornelia turned to Espérance, speaking gently.

'My dear, you will come upstairs and rest.'

But rest had already come to Espérance, and she sank back senseless in Cornelia's arms.

Everyone came flocking out of the drawing-room at Cornelia's call, and gathered round the white, still figure, with exclamations of pity. The Dean was greatly distressed, and bent over her with more anxiety and earnestness than he had ever shown before to a body that was not 'heavenly.'

'Someone should go for a doctor, surely, my dears, she is very cold, poor child, poor child! I'm afraid this has been a grief to her.'

'My dear father,' said Mrs. Mortlake, impatiently, 'she has only fainted. French people always do faint when they think it becoming, they like to make a scene.'

The Miss Lowdells looked on wonderingly, Bertha made pitying remarks in an undertone to George Palgrave, Cornelia knelt on the ground supporting Esperance's head, and looking at the faces round her with angry impatience.

'Will no one do anything? Why do you all stand staring like this, can't you fetch some water?'

Just then Mrs. Lowdell came downstairs.

'Someone fainting? Dear me! poor child!' and she began to chafe Espérance's hands in a capable sort of way, which relieved Cornelia.

'What ought we to do with her?' she asked, turning with confidence to the motherly old lady.

'I should carry her up to bed,' said Mrs. Lowdell, 'she can't breathe with everyone standing round her here.'

Cornelia did not hesitate for a moment, but to the surprise of all, suddenly rose, took Espérance's inanimate form in her strong arms, and quietly walked upstairs. Mrs. Lowdell followed, bringing various restoratives, and together they did all in their power for the poor child; but it seemed as if nothing would bring her to life again, and Cornelia growing frightened, was just proposing to send for a doctor, when faint signs of returning consciousness began to show themselves.

The eyelids quivered at last and slowly opened, Espérance looked up half hopefully, then remembering all with a swift pang turned her face away and relapsed into semi-

consciousness. But Mrs. Lowdell insisted on her taking some sal volatile, and then a terrible idea crossed her mind and roused her fully.

'Cornelia,' she said, in a weak yet eager voice, 'Gaspard did not see me faint, did he?'

'No, he was quite out of sight,' said Cornelia, reassuringly.

'You are quite certain?'

'Perfectly.'

And with that Espérance was satisfied; she had kept up to the last, for a moment she was quite soothed by the relief of knowing it, then the reaction set in, her desolation broke upon her, and she burst into a passionate fit of sobbing.

The tearless sobs which had so alarmed Gaspard on the previous evening, were even more alarming to Cornelia. Was it possible that her stern words had really checked Espérance's tears? Good Mrs. Lowdell's exhortations made her feel the more miserable. 'Cry, my dear, have a good cry, and you will be better.' But still there were only those heartrending sobs, and a gasping, quivering agony, terrible to witness.

Mrs. Lowdell proposed that she should have a cup of tea, and Cornelia, thankful for something to do, hastened away to order it, then returning, began to clear the table of a disorderly heap of clothing. Espérance, looking up, caught sight of Gaspard's National Guard uniform among the useless or worn-out things he had left behind—the sight recalled a long train of memories, and with a low moan of, 'Papa! Gaspard!' she buried her face in the pillow, and burst into tears.

Both the watchers were thankful indeed, for they had become seriously uneasy; they did not attempt to check her, but let the long pent-up tears have their course, and

after a time she grew quiet once more, and fell into a troubled sleep. But Cornelia's anxieties were not over. In the middle of dinner she was summoned away by Bella's nurse, who had been left with Espérance—Mademoiselle had woke up in a high fever, and would not talk a word of English.

CHAPTER XXV.

> 'When some beloved voice that was to you
> Both sound and sweetness, faileth suddenly,
> And silence against which you dare not cry,
> Aches round you like a strong disease and new—
> What hope? What help? What music will undo
> That silence to your sense?'
>
> E. B. Browning.

The Deanery was all in commotion the next day, for before long it was known that Espérance was ill with typhoid fever. Mrs. Mortlake was, as usual, sure that she could have helped it.

'I do think it is very inconsiderate of people to be ill in other people's houses,' she grumbled, 'just think of the expense it will be, and there's my father being persuaded by Mrs. Lowdell to have a trained nurse, who will eat dreadfully, those nurses are always regular cormorants.'

'My dear Christabel, the money does not come out of your pocket,' said Cornelia, impatiently.

'It's all very well to say so,' replied Mrs. Mortlake. 'But you know it comes to the same thing, it will be ours some day, and why should my poor little Bella be defrauded of her own rights? And besides, it's very awkward to have illness in the house, and there's no knowing that it isn't infectious, perhaps the water is poisoned or something wrong with the drainage.'

'Probably,' said Cornelia, with much coolness. 'We

shall have everything looked to, and in any case you and Bella had better go away for that child is unbearably noisy.'

This was more true than polite, and Mrs. Mortlake coloured angrily.

'It is all very well for you to talk, but I do feel being turned out of my own father's house by a foreigner. If you had been left a widow with one little child, I think you would have been rather more considerate, Cornelia.'

'Should I?' said Cornelia, with sarcasm, 'well all I ask is that you will consider somebody but yourself, Christabel, perhaps you would have the goodness to order the carriage in time for the 8.35, the Lowdells are going this evening.'

With this, Cornelia swept out of the room, to be waylaid on the stairs by George with a telegram form in his hand.

'I am just going to the office with this,' he said, showing it to her, 'my mother will be delighted to have Bertha, I am sure, and she ought not to stay here, ought she?'

'No, no, the sooner the house is empty the better,' said Cornelia, thinking only of Espérance's quiet, and George hurried away, inwardly blessing his little French cousin for her opportune illness.

The Lowdells, too, were packing with all possible speed, for their mother had considerately proposed to go that evening. 'Not the least because I am nervous about the girls, you know, but we shall only be in the way,' she explained to Cornelia, proving her kindness still further by staying in Espérance's room till the nurse arrived.

So the Deanery was speedily emptied, and the next day found only the Dean and Cornelia left behind, to hear with dismay that they had all been drinking water from a

poisoned well, and that Espérance's illness was fully accounted for. She had for long been very much out of health, owing to the privations and shocks of the siege, and had naturally been the first victim.

Cornelia had never dreamt of acting as a sick nurse before, and felt hopelessly at a loss when the trained nurse went to take her rest, and she was called to take her turn with the patient. Luckily, at first, Espérance was fairly quiet, but later on Cornelia was frightened out of her wits by her wild ravings, and the strange language seemed to make it all the more terrible. Those hours revealed to her more of Espérance's life and character than she had ever known before, and her father's name was so continually on her lips, that Cornelia was more and more rebuked for having ever ventured to call French love shallow and fleeting.

She seemed to be living through the siege once more with all its horrors, and her delirious ravings were almost always of *sorties*, battlefields, and partings, while day after day she would rehearse in anguish the scene at her father's deathbed. Then would come cries for Gaspard, almost as piteous, or lamentations over his poverty and sufferings, with references to the luxurious living at the Deanery, which made Cornelia shudder, in their vivid contrast. Occasionally, but much less often, her own private troubles would be her subject—Mrs. Mortlake's injustice, or Cornelia's coldness, and the hundred little misunderstandings which made life at Rilchester so wearing, while the *mal du pays*, which had beset her so strongly when she first came to the Deanery, was fully revealed to her cousin.

After the first day, Cornelia's study was deserted; whenever her father did not need her she was with Espérance, waiting on her with more skill than might have been expected, and proving a great help to the nurse by

interpreting the feverish, impatient wishes, always expressed in French. The days and weeks passed by slowly, and her anxiety deepened, for there was no lessening in the fever, and the doctors held out very little hope, more especially when they heard of the previous privations and overwork. She could never have believed that in such a short time she could have grown so fond of her little cousin, and her daily watching was becoming very painful, though she would not have given it up for the world. The all important twenty-first day was one of disappointment and double anxiety, for there was no shade of improvement, and the fever ran frightfully high. The doctor took Cornelia aside after his second visit.

'If Mdlle. de Mabillon has any near relations they should come at once,' he said, gravely.

'She has none in England,' said Cornelia, thinking with a shudder what poor Gaspard would say when he heard. 'She is really in such danger, then?'

'The most imminent danger,' replied the doctor, accustomed to regard Cornelia as a hard, matter-of-fact lady, able to stand anything. 'In fact, Miss Collinson, I fear it is my duty to tell you that I think it a great question if she pulls through the next twenty-four hours.'

Cornelia turned ashy pale, and the doctor, a little surprised, hastened to add, 'Unless we find there is more fever to-night, it is just possible then that she may get through.'

Cornelia could not speak. With a heavy sigh she turned again to the sick room, where each moan of pain, each delirious exclamation, seemed to pierce her heart. A sense of responsibility, too, overpowered her, there was something dreadful in the thought that this child was left alone save for her; she wished she had loved her more, or could make her understand, even now, that she loved her,

but it was too late, and the consciousness of her loneliness evidently haunted Espérance, for to-day, mixed with her entreaties to her father and Gaspard to come to her, were piteous descriptions of her forlorn helplessness.

The time was so very critical that the doctor remained for some hours, the nurse and Cornelia stood by the bed too, though there was little to do but to watch that terrible struggle between life and death.

In the evening, the Dean came to the door as usual to make inquiries, and the doctor brought him into the room, having prepared him for the worst. He was quite overcome, and the mere sight of Espérance was a shock to him, as she lay pillowed high, her forehead bandaged, her brown eyes wild and glittering, her face drawn with pain, and crimson with the flush of fever.

She was moaning Gaspard's name piteously enough, and the Dean felt a keen pang of remorse as he remembered how gladly he had seen the last of his nephew a few weeks ago; he almost wished him back again now. Scarcely knowing what he did, he bent down, and took Espérance's thin, burning hands in his. She had not noticed his entrance, but this made her look up suddenly; a glad smile passed over her troubled face, and half raising herself with the strength of delirium, she cried, 'Papa! papa! have you come?' then, falling back again, said, much more quietly, 'I am so tired! Won't you carry me?'

She closed her eyes, and they all watched in breathless suspense, till at length a look of entire peace stole over her features, and her quiet, regular breathing showed that she had fallen into a natural sleep.

For two hours the Dean stood in this novel position, personating M. de Mabillon, and patiently holding the hands of his old enemy's child. He was growing undoubtedly fond of Espérance, and, moreover, he felt some-

thing of the sense of responsibility which had been oppressing Cornelia, and had a great terror of her death, feeling sure that it would burden him with that sense of guiltiness which had haunted him when his sister died. He wished he had not overheard that cry for Gaspard, it rang in his ears tormentingly, and though he reminded himself that the Ceylon appointment was a very good one, he could not but remember that if he had chosen he might easily have found a situation for Gaspard in England.

On the whole, the Dean's reflections were not very comfortable as he watched his sister's child; and he was relieved when, after a long sleep, she woke up much more free from fever than they had ventured to hope. His hands being released, he stole away to the observatory and tried to forget his annoyances; but in spite of the attractions of his beloved telescope, he was haunted all the night by Gaspard's name.

In the sick room matters went on very hopefully. Espérance took some nourishment, and then fell again into a long, dreamless sleep, and in the morning the doctor was so well satisfied with her improvement, that Cornelia began to take heart again. She slept at intervals through the day, and did not take much notice, but on the following day she was much more herself. In the afternoon when the nurse was lying down, Cornelia was startled by a sudden question in Espérance's weak voice, the English words coming with a sort of hesitation.

'Gaspard does not know I am ill, does he?'

Cornelia crossed the room to the bedside.

'No, dear, but now you are better, I will write.'

'Perhaps I shall be well enough soon to put in a letter. What day is it?'

'It is Saturday, the 13th of July. We will write by the next mail, on Friday.'

Espérance was too weak to talk any more. She lay musing over Cornelia's words, greatly surprised to find how long she had been ill. But she had still many days of pain and weakness to look forward to, for although she was out of danger her recovery was very slow and wearisome. She was as helpless as a baby, and though good and patient, she could not withstand the sense of aching loneliness that weighed upon her spirits. Everyone was kind to her, but she longed unspeakably for Gaspard, and day after day she lay crying quietly, wiping away her tears and trying to smile when anyone spoke to her, but far too weak to be able to control herself.

She saw a good deal of Cornelia, for the nurse always went to lie down in the afternoon after her night's watching, but unluckily she was rather in awe of her, and Cornelia herself, though extremely anxious to be kind, had not the quick observation and ready tact which are needed in sick nursing. She would sit hour by hour reading quietly, taking the greatest pains to make no noise, when perhaps Espérance was very low-spirited, and wanted a little cheerful talk, or at another time she would carry on long whispered conversations with some unseen servant at the door, thereby disturbing and exciting the invalid far more than if she had spoken aloud. Her diffidence, too, was a great hindrance, for she never ventured to do anything for Espérance without an anxious questioning. 'Would you fancy this?' or, 'Shall I give you that?' till the poor child was so worried that she would negative everything, rather than be troubled with the decision.

Her native politeness, however, stood her in good stead, and Cornelia never found this out, but was only touched by her gratitude, and as the weeks passed by she grew more and more fond of her.

One afternoon early in August, Espérance was sitting

alone in her bedroom, Cornelia being at the Cathedral, and the nurse having her tea; she was now so much better that there was no reason she should not be left sometimes. This was always the most miserable time of her day, and this afternoon she was more forlorn than ever, though she could not have told the reason. Everything jarred on her nerves, the Cathedral bells seemed distractingly loud, the clock ticked unequally and fidgetted her, and a provoking bluebottle fly buzzed about the window. She was too weak to cross the room and try to catch it, so she lay back in her arm-chair wearily, watching the tops of the trees as they waved gently in the summer wind, and wondering where Gaspard was, and what he was doing, while the tears coursed silently down her cheeks. Just as she was feeling a momentary relief at the last stroke of the bells, a knock came at her door, and to her great surprise the servant announced 'Lady Worthington.' Espérance felt a thrill of joy as she looked up, and saw Lady Worthington's sympathetic, unchanged face, and heard again her low, comforting voice.

'My poor child! why, how pale and thin you are! but they tell me you are better.'

'Yes, I feel better, thank you,' said Espérance, wearily.

'But convalescence is always dull work,' said Lady Worthington. 'I met Cornelia just now, and she gave me leave to come and see you, she tells me you have had a long illness.'

'Yes, it has seemed long,' sighed Espérance. 'You see I can't do anything even now, and it is hard to sit and think all day, and then—I do so want Gaspard.'

Her tears fell anew, and Lady Worthington, seeing that they arose quite as much from physical weakness and depression as from grief, hardly knew what to do for her. She glanced round the great, comfortless room, and could

not wonder that the poor child felt forlorn. Every necessary was there, certainly; but there was an air of discomfort and bareness about everything. A little shaky table which might have been pretty enough with flowers, was staggering under the weight of some of Cornelia's bulky volumes; a number of medicine-bottles were crowded on to the window-sill, and Espérance herself had been left in a slippery, American-cloth chair, called by courtesy 'easy,' but in reality most uncomfortable.

Lady Worthington was perplexed. She could not make, or even suggest, improvements in the Dean's house, and yet this want of the little feminine comforts and adornments vexed her, and she felt sure that it must be trying to Espérance. With a sense of relief she perceived some common property in the shape of the bluebottle fly on the window-pane.

'This great fly is worrying you, my dear, I shall put an end to his noise,' and kind-hearted Lady Worthington rose with alacrity to flick the poor insect mercilessly with her handkerchief, till it fell out of the window stunned. After that she felt a little better, and came again to Espérance's side, determined to make the most of her present opportunity. A bright idea had struck her—the Deanery was forlorn and uncomfortable, but what if she could get Espérance away from the Deanery? She revolved various plans in her mind, while fondling the little invalid in silence. At last she made up her mind, and began by a judicious course of questioning.

'Ought you not to have a change of air, dear? Has Cornelia said anything to you about going away?'

'No, and I hope we shall not go,' said Espérance. 'We should only go to Scarborough, where Mrs. Mortlake and Bella are staying, and I would much rather be alone with Cornelia.'

'But I think you should have a change, you want a great deal of setting up yet. I wonder whether you would like to come and pay a visit to Frances, she is down in Wales with the children. Sir Henry and I only left them on Saturday, and they are to stay on for another month.'

Espérance started forward, a glow of colour rising in her pale cheeks, 'Oh, Lady Worthington, do you really mean it? How good—how kind you are!'

'You would like it then?'

'More than anything in the world! It seems too good, too wonderful! only I have been so cross and fretful, that I really don't deserve it.'

'Poor child, that is not your fault I am sure; you will soon get better when you are away, there is nothing like Welsh air to my mind, and Llanfairfechan, the little village where Sir Henry has taken a house, is a charming place, with sea and mountains too. Frances will be so delighted to have you.'

They were still talking over this plan, when Cornelia came back from the service.

'I wonder whether you will spare us your invalid for a little while,' said Lady Worthington, when she had joined them. 'I have been asking Espérance whether she will stay with us in Wales for a month.'

Cornelia felt a sudden pang. Was she to lose this child whom she had watched over so anxiously? she felt as if she were being robbed; then looking up she saw the glow of animation on Espérance's face, and felt sadly, that the Worthingtons had been kind to her in the days of her own coldness, and that naturally they were more loved. With an effort she spoke cheerfully.

'I think it would be very good for her indeed, if you are sure it is quite convenient to you, Lady Worthington.'

'Perfectly, there is a room doing nothing, and Frances

will be so glad of a companion. Sir Henry and I are going to Switzerland, but she is not strong enough really to enjoy travelling, and prefers staying in Wales. I wonder whether Espérance would be well enough to travel down on the 8th, I could take her myself then.'

Espérance declared she was well enough to go that very minute, though an hour before she had not felt equal to walking across the room; but the prospect of change seemed to have put new life into her, and Cornelia was so pleased to see her better, that she was glad the invitation had been given, and promised to talk matters over with the doctor the next day, and to let Lady Worthington know.

CHAPTER XXVI

'There is a temptation, and a very common one—to withdraw from those who are uncongenial. We so crave for sympathy, that life seems scarcely endurable without it. But we may be assured that when it is the trial put upon us by God . . . we shall, as a rule, be far safer in accepting it than in trying to escape from it. . . . Loneliness, isolation, misconception, absence of sympathy, if accepted cheerfully, are doing a work far greater than can be achieved by any efforts of our own individual will.'

MISS SEWELL'S *Thoughts on the Age.*

THE doctor highly approved of the proposed change, and as there were only a few days for preparation, Cornelia's hands were full. She found herself engrossed in all sorts of feminine trivialities, in a most surprising and unnatural way. There was a shady hat to be chosen for Espérance, clothes to be overlooked and packed, and even a little needlework to be done. With this latter she was sadly at a loss, but with a determination not to give it to the servants, she shut herself up in her study, and puzzled it out for herself, by the help of mathematics and common

sense, and Espérance had certainly never worn anything so scientifically made before.

The 8th of August was as fine as could be wished, and towards the middle of the day, Lady Worthington and Espérance started on their journey. Poor Cornelia felt very sad when the actual parting came, though Espérance's good-bye was as warm and affectionate as possible. She threw her arms round her cousin's neck, 'Dear Cornelia, you have been so kind to me, and I have been such a trouble, perhaps when I come back you will let me wait upon you.'

'You must get quite strong again, dear,' said Cornelia, quietly returning her embrace. 'And be sure to let me know how you are, after the journey.'

The train moved slowly off, and Cornelia turned home with a sigh, to find her study almost oppressively dull and quiet, while Espérance lay back among her cushions, feasting her eyes with the fresh green of the fields and trees, and finding beauty even in the flat environs of Rilchester, after her long imprisonment.

Lady Worthington was a perfect travelling companion, she did not tease her to take a rest just at first, but let her enjoy the change and novelty thoroughly; produced a tempting little luncheon just at the right time, and finally made her so comfortable that it was impossible not to go to sleep. She did not wake till they reached Chester, and then, much refreshed by half-an-hour's rest and some coffee, was quite ready to go on again. The first breath of sea air as they passed by Holywell and the broad estuary of the Dee, seemed to revive her, and when they reached the coast her delight was quite charming to watch, and her joyous exclamations pleased and amused Lady Worthington.

The country was looking beautiful in the sunset light,

and Espérance was so enraptured with it all, that she even compared it to her own well-beloved scenery; the mountains reminded her of the mountains of Auvergne, and even in Conway Castle she traced some likeness to the Château, though a Welshman travelling in the same carriage evidently regarded this latter comparison as the reverse of flattering.

Just as the sun went down into the sea, looking like a great ball of fire, they reached their journey's end, and Espérance with dazzled eyes was glad enough to sink back again among her cushions and wait for orders. Harry and Fred were waiting on the platform, looking cool and countrified in their brown holland suits.

'Aunt Fanny is waiting in the pony-carriage, mamma,' they both cried in a breath. 'We will bring all your things from here.'

'Very well,' said Lady Worthington, who was fond of making even ten-year-old boys useful. 'Harry, you bring these cushions and bags, and Fred, see that a black trunk and my small box are sent round at once in the cart—now, Espérance, we will come,' and putting a supporting arm round her little charge, she led her through the station to the pony-carriage, where Frances was waiting, looking fairer and prettier than ever, in her light summer dress. Espérance received a home-like greeting in French, and was made comfortable in the carriage, while Lady Worthington talked to Frances.

'She is tired of course with the journey, you must not judge of her looks to-night. I think you had better drive home at once, and let her have some supper and go to bed. I shall stay and walk back with the boys.'

'Very well, we will start then,' and Frances gathered up the reins, and the little bay ponies carried them swiftly away.

Espérance looked round her with languid pleasure as they crossed a bridge over the little river, now scantily covering its stony bed, ascended the hill, and then branching to the left, drove along the road in the direction of Penmaenmawr, till, nestling just at the foot of the mountain, among a plantation of fir-trees, they came to the house which Sir Henry had taken for the summer.

Frances took her upstairs at once, and indeed Espérance was quite tired out and thankful to go to bed, but with all her weariness was a restful consciousness that she had come to the right place, and to-night for the first time since her illness she did not cry herself to sleep.

Lady Worthington was obliged to go the next day, for she was to meet her husband in London and start at once for the Continent. In fact her expedition to Rilchester had been solely on Espérance's account. She had first heard of her illness from the wife of the Archdeacon, whom she had met at Llandudno, and her motherly soul had been so grieved at the thought of anyone being nursed by Cornelia, that she had at once found an excuse for a short visit to Worthington Hall, and with much delight had been able to carry off her *protégée* for change of air.

'It is indeed, my dear, a clear proving of our two vocations,' she said laughingly to her sister. 'I have brought Espérance down here with all possible care, and have left the strictest orders for her diet, her sea-bathing, her afternoon siesta, and her quinine and steel; to you I leave your special function—the 'ghostly' mission—only stipulating that you will consider her body in the matter of church services.'

Frances promised, laughing heartily, and Lady Worthington started on her travels, after having seen the invalid comfortably established in a shady corner of the

garden, looking none the worse for the fatigues of the previous day.

For the first day or two this was about all that Espérance cared to do; she lay contentedly under the fir-trees, catching glimpses of the sea, or looking up the grassy slope to the more rugged side of Penmaenmawr, wondering how Kathie and the boys could ever have climbed to the top, while the only sounds that broke the entire stillness were faint echoes from the neighbouring quarry, and the low plash of the waves on the beach. The railway which ran not far from the house was no disturbance to her, she rather liked it, and would watch the trains passing to and fro with an odd sort of affection, because they were a connecting link with Gaspard. The distance between them, though so great, was quite bridged over by railways and steamboats, and every train seemed to her in consequence a kind of messenger of comfort.

Frances was a most charming nurse; she had been ill so much herself that she understood and sympathised perfectly, and Espérance could not help feeling what a contrast it was to Cornelia's well-meant but wearisome attendance. It was a pleasure to look at Frances as she moved quietly about, or to watch her white hands as she sat working, still more to listen to her delightful voice as she read aloud. She had chosen *Fleurange* as the book most likely to suit her visitor, and Espérance was so delighted with it that she was never tired of being read to.

It was not until Sunday evening that she had much talk with Frances. She had been a good deal alone during the day, and Frances was afraid she had found the time long, for her face had a little of the burdened expression which it so often bore at Rilchester.

'We must have some reading, *chérie*,' she said, when

the children had started for the evening service. 'I am afraid you have been lonely.'

'No, indeed,' said Espérance, looking up more brightly, 'I have only been thinking. This morning when you were all at church, and I sat out here on the lawn, it reminded me so much of the Sundays at the Château; you know in the summer when there was no *pasteur* who could come to us, papa used always to hold a service, and we used to sit on the terrace under the great cedar. It was so beautiful—better than a Cathedral I think—and when one got tired, one could look up through the branches to the blue sky, or down the hill to the village, where all the chimneys were sending up blue smoke because of the Sunday dinners that were cooking, or right across the valley to the mountains. Someone, one of the *pasteurs* I think, told me it was not right to look about in service time, so after that I tried not to look at the village, but I thought it could not be wrong to look at the mountains, because you know in the Bible it says, "I *will* lift up mine eyes unto the hills."'

Frances could not help smiling.

'And did you have many people at your services?'

'No, not many; just ourselves and about four or five families from cottages near us, and old Jacques Bonnier and his wife, and Marie his daughter—they had been servants of papa's once, or of his father's, I think. Well, one Sunday, I remember quite well, we were all under the cedar, and it was very hot; papa was reading a sermon by M. Adolphe Monod, and somehow it seemed very *triste*. It was about one of the very sad Psalms—the eighty-eighth, I think; it spoke of living without any ray of comfort in the midst of troubles, and, as I had no troubles at all then, I thought it would not matter if I did not listen, so I just looked away a little. But just then I

heard one sentence which somehow stayed in my head just because it puzzled me so. It was something like this: "However we may be surrounded by the gifts of God, and however we may be blessed in body or soul, something is wanting to enable God's love to find its way to our hearts, and that is—suffering." I could not understand this at all, and talked to papa about it afterwards, but he said he thought it was quite true, and that I should, too, when I was older. Well, I remembered this when you were all out this morning, and Frances, I am really afraid that my life has been all wrong, for I have been trying how much happiness I could possibly get, and feeling so miserable when fresh troubles came.'

'It cannot be wrong to wish for happiness, and one must naturally shrink from troubles,' said Frances; 'but I fancy, *ma mie*, like most of us, you are rather apt to think that happiness is the great object of life.'

Espérance mused in silence, then said, 'Yes, just now I am sure my object in life is to be careful and saving, so that Gaspard and I may live together again—to be happy, that is, in the future.'

'And that is quite a right object, but I know you will not live through these three years without any other motive. You see we were not put into the world simply to be happy, but to do something. You will say, that is a truism; but it is one we often lose sight of.'

'I feel as if everything had ended now Gaspard has gone; there is nothing but just to live on at the Deanery.'

'But "just living on" is rather a serious business,' said Frances, quietly. 'It is not easy to throw ourselves into the lives of others, to help them and sympathise with them, and love them. I think there is a good deal for you to do.'

'I should like it to be nice doing,' said Espérance, 'and that is so hard—if one could only choose one's work.'

'It would be much more risky, and we should lose the discipline. Ah! I see the corners of your mouth turn down at that quotation from your Sœur Thérèse, but we should be poor creatures if we were always allowed our own way.'

'But still, I do not quite see that suffering does so very much for one,' said Espérance, a little impatiently, 'and surely it doesn't please God?'

'I think patient endurance does,' said Frances; 'and He knows what suffering is best for us. You may talk against it, *ma mie*, but I think if you remember last autumn and what you said of it then, you will see that suffering has done something for you. I don't think it is good to dwell too much on such personal experiences, but I cannot help remembering some rather bitter words that I heard that day about the impossibility of loving anybody. I think the love is growing.'

'You were very good to bear with me, I was dreadful that day, and so miserable. Yes, I think you and papa and M. Monod are right, life is very different now to what it was last year, and it is not lack of pain that has made me happier.'

Frances looked down at the pale, shadowy face, and felt that indeed it was not, but there was something in the expression of the gravely sweet mouth, which would not allow her to grieve over Espérance's early troubles. The passing of a train changed the current of their thoughts.

'To-morrow perhaps I shall have a letter from Gaspard,' said Espérance, with a glad light in her eyes. 'I have been counting the days, and if the mail is early, a

letter would get to Rilchester on Sunday, and I should have it forwarded by to-morrow.'

And with that they began to talk over Gaspard's prospects in Ceylon, and Frances heard, for the first time, all the details of his visit to Rilchester.

On the Monday afternoon Espérance was quite well enough to enjoy a drive, and Frances took her in the pony-carriage along the shore; she was enchanted with the sea, and was very desirous to go on it at once.

'I am not sure what your doctor would say to that,' said Frances. 'But in a week or two you will be stronger, and then we might try.'

'And we will row to that little island, of which I cannot say the name,' said Espérance, eagerly. 'I like it so much, it looks so lonely, just broken off, as it were, from Anglesea. It will be delightful to be really on the sea. I shall know what the voyage to Ceylon will feel like, it will be good practice.'

Frances smiled. 'I was thinking about your letter —shall we call at the post-office and see if it has come?'

'Oh! if we might!' and Espérance breathed more quickly as Frances turned the ponies' heads, and drove up the village street. She tried hard to believe that she did not expect anything, and waited, trembling with excitement, till Frances appeared at the door of the post-office with a reassuring face, and—yes, it really was—a letter in her hand.

'It has the Rilchester post-mark,' she said, and Espérance let fall the reins, snatched at it, and almost tore the envelope to pieces in her hurry to open it. Within there was indeed the precious enclosure, a thin, blue envelope, directed in Gaspard's flourishy, copperplate writing. She did not hurry any more, now that she was

secure of the letter there was no need, and in truth her eyes were blinded with tears, it was pleasure enough to hold it fast, and to reflect that one of these messages would come to her now each week.

Frances drove home quickly, and then in the quiet of her own room Espérance opened her letter.

It was delightfully long and closely written, each day so fully described that she seemed to be living through everything with him, and her happiness was all the greater because she had not expected such details, for Gaspard's letters from London had been necessarily poor in this respect, and had generally been written in a strain of forced merriment in order to veil from her his sufferings. But this was a really journal-like description, written with delightful ease, while little colloquial expressions here and there brought the tears to Espérance's eyes. 'Ah, *mon cœur*, if you could have seen this,' or, 'When you come, *chérie*, you will enjoy that.'

She lived with him throughout the voyage, learnt to know the laconic captain, and the graphically described passengers, entered into the landing at Colombo with its bustle and confusion and heat, laughed over Mr. Seymour's jokes, and the accounts of the shopping and bargaining in the town, then travelled with him to Dickoya, and saw his future home in Mr. Seymour's bungalow, tried to understand the size of the estate given to her in an almost fabulous number of square *kilomètres*, and sympathised with Gaspard's difficulty in learning Tamil. And if, when at last it was ended, she came back to the present with something of a shock, and was obliged to have a good cry, yet Frances understood all perfectly, and instead of adopting Cornelia's plan of pointing out the extreme ingratitude and foolishness of such behaviour, petted and caressed her till her smiles returned, and she was eager to

read some extracts from the letter to anyone who could appreciate its delights.

Whether the pleasure of receiving her first letter from Ceylon had anything to do with her recovery, it would be hard to say, but certainly from that day Espérance took a fresh start, not only in bodily strength, but in spirits. Frances was delighted to hear her laughing and talking with Kathie and the boys, and entering with a charming enthusiasm into any game which was not too tiring for her.

'It seems rather shocking that I should enjoy this at seventeen,' she said one day, looking up from a game of ball, which she was teaching the children to play French fashion. 'I have not played a single game since I left the convent. You can't think what fun we had there! and such skipping!—ah, if I only had a rope!'

'A rope! a rope!' shouted Fred, running towards the house; he had constituted himself Espérance's cavalier, and always ran on errands for her.

In a few minutes he came back with an unpromising-looking piece of box-cord, and Espérance, with a delighted exclamation, took it in her deft little hands, knotted some handles, and began to skip with a grace and agility which fairly astonished them all.

Two minutes was enough for her, however.

'I am growing old,' she said laughingly, to Frances, and willingly gave up the rope to Kathie, who tried a feeble English imitation, good-naturedly putting up with the uncomplimentary comparisons of the boys.

After that skipping became the fashion, and Espérance, in spite of her confession that she was growing old, was evidently glad of an excuse to take the rope, though she always said she was giving a lesson to Kathie.

CHAPTER XXVII.

'Avoir beaucoup souffert, c'est comme ceux qui savent beaucoup de langues, avoir appris à tout comprendre, et à se faire comprendre de tous.'

'AUNT FANNY, we really must take you to Aber,' said Harry, very beseechingly, one morning towards the end of August.

'Yes, Auntie, we were there yesterday after the rain, and the waterfall is just splendid. Can't we go to-day all together?'

Frances looked across the table at the invalid, and being reassured by her looks, thought that it might perhaps be managed. The expedition had long been deferred, for it was impossible to drive along the last mile of the glen, and Espérance had not of course been able to walk so far. She was so much better now, however, that the scheme began to seem more feasible, and this day she was so eager to go that Frances after some consideration gave consent.

They started early in the afternoon, a very merry party, Frances driving, Espérance and Kathie squeezed in beside her, and the boys in the back seat. The day was most glorious, and the richly wooded glen looked so beautiful that Frances was obliged to drive slowly in order to give her full sympathy to the eager entreaties to look at some especially lovely view, either of the sea, or the river, or the mountains. Leaving the carriage at the rest-house, they walked slowly on towards the falls, and whether it was due to the beauty and novelty of the way, or to the fresh mountain air, Espérance was not at all over-tired, when at length they reached the end of the

glen, and sat down on the great, grey boulders at the foot of the waterfall.

She gazed in wonder at the down-rushing torrent, as it came foaming over the brown rocks, here, white as snow, there, separating itself into little silvery streamlets, but all mingling in the pool below, and hurrying away down the rocky bed of the river. Frances was amused and charmed by her *naïve* expressions of rapture and amazement, and watched with pleasure the healthful glow of colour in her cheeks, and the happy brightness of her eyes. She looked delightfully at her ease, leaning back among the rocks, in her shady straw hat and blue cambric polonaise, and Frances was just wondering what constituted that happy French faculty of perfect enjoyment, and contrasting it with the heavy, bored looks of a party of tourists who were finding fault with everything, when a sudden cry and splash made her look round in terror to see if the children were all safe. To her relief they were all three in sight, scrambling about the rocks on the other side of the river, but Espérance had quitted her easy posture, and was bending over the boulders down to the water, and just as Frances hurried to the spot, she had helped to drag up a little terrified girl, of about seven years old, who had slipped into the river.

'There, do not cry, you are quite safe,' said Espérance, panting a little with her exertions.

But before Frances could speak, a little, dark, middle-aged lady, bustled up, her round, brown eyes all anxiety.

'Marguérite, *ma chère!* what is it then? *Ciel!* you have really been in the water! ah! what pity, with your new boots, too. And this lady has kindly helped you? I hope Marguérite has thanked you, Mademoiselle?'

Espérance was on her feet now, her colour came and went, and she waited impatiently till the little lady had

finished speaking, then bending forward she said in a half choked voice, 'Madame! Madame Lemercier! do you not know me?'

Madame Lemercier looked, threw up her little hands, and then with many exclamations, embraced Espérance with fervour, quite regardless of the tourist eyes around.

'*Mon enfant!*—Espérance!—ah! but this is a happiness. We meet in a strange land, my child! ah! who would have thought it?'

'Dear Madame! how long it seems since we parted! how much has happened!' Then turning to Frances, 'I must introduce you to Madame Lemercier, a very dear friend of ours, who took care of me in the siege. Miss Neville knows you well by name, Madame, I have told her how good you were to me then.'

'Ah! *mon enfant*, we each consoled the other. But let us sit down and talk. I forgot you though, *ma pauvre* Marguérite, pardon me, you are very wet, my child.'

'Not very,' said the little girl, blushing, 'my stockings will dry in the sun. See, here comes papa.'

A pleasant-looking man, of three-and-thirty, came striding over the rocks towards them as she spoke.

'Ho! Miss Maggie, so you have been in the river I hear, frightening the fishes, eh? What do you say, Madame, should she not get her things dried?'

'I fear she will en-cold herself,' said Madame, anxiously. 'Perhaps, Monsieur, we had better return at once.'

Maggie interrupted, however.

'But, papa, Madame has met a friend. The young lady who helped me out of the water knew Madame at Paris.'

'Ah! indeed!' and the gentleman took off his hat to

Espérance, while Madame gravely introduced 'Monsieur Henderson and Mdlle. de Mabillon.'

'I hardly know how to thank you enough for helping my little girl,' he said, pleasantly. 'I hope Madame will instil into Maggie some of the ready adroitness of your nation. But as to these wet clothes,' he continued, turning to Madame Lemercier. 'Suppose I take Maggie back to the inn, Madame, and let her dry them by the fire; we shall be back in an hour, and you will like to have some talk with Mdlle. de Mabillon.'

'Monsieur is too good, but it will prevent you from searching for the ferns. Let me take Marguérite back.'

'No, no, I will find ferns on the way,' said Mr. Henderson, good-naturedly. 'We will be back in an hour. Come, Maggie.'

'A good gentleman, a kind gentleman,' said Madame Lemercier, relapsing into French, as she waved her last farewell to Maggie and her father. 'She is my little pupil Marguérite, you know, and a very amiable little girl. But, *ma chère*, come, tell me all that has happened to you, you are thin, my poor child, thinner than in the siege, that is very wrong; and you are altered, ah! very much altered, there is more of the angel in your face, it is no more a naughty little piece of humanity, you must have suffered my poor little one. But I fear you grow too good, and then you will die, keep a little naughtiness, *ma chère*, do not become too much like a saint.'

Espérance laughed merrily.

'Do not fear that, Madame, I assure you there is too little danger. I have had an illness, that is why I am thin.'

'An illness? Ah! I was sure you would suffer from the effects of that siege, it was too rigorous, too trying for one so young. I myself have never felt so well since

that time of starvation. But tell me of Gaspard, *mon enfant.*'

'He is in Ceylon, on a coffee plantation,' said Espérance, and she told Madame Lemercier all the details of Gaspard's letter. Madame noticed that there were tears in her eyes.

'Ah! *ma chère*, we women have our part in the hardness of life, it is not easy to be left behind,' she said gently, laying her hand on Espérance's. 'But we must have courage, my child, and it is easier for us, for we know they are strong, whereas they know that we are weak and unprotected. You heard of course of Monsieur's arrest?'

'Yes, dear Madame, Gaspard told me. But do let me hear what happened to you after we left.'

'Ah, *chérie!* what a history it is! a thousand times did I thank heaven that you were spared the horrors of that second siege. I knew not what to think, I scarcely saw Victor, he was always engrossed either with his writing, or—or with more direct means in the furtherance of his cause. At first he was certain of success, and I could bear the tumults and the horrors better, because I hoped that in the end his party would be victorious, and that we should have peace, and a better constitution. What can a woman know of the rights and wrongs of such questions? I trusted my husband. But then came the furious repulse. Victor was in despair, he knew that all was over—I entreated him to fly, to hide himself, but no, he was always brave, he refused to do so, he said to me, "Antoinette, the people I have incited and led on cannot fly, I must stay with them." So he stayed, my brave husband, he stayed, and was arrested.'

Here Madame was obliged to wipe away her tears, and her voice was broken with sobs as she continued. 'He and many others that had been with him were arrested,

thrown into prison, then marched out of Paris, away, I knew not whither, I only knew that it was a burning summer day—that his sufferings would be terrible. I found him again after a time—he was imprisoned at Z——. He was still alive. I went there, *mon enfant*, and with many of his colleagues he was tried. Some were condemned to death, others to transportation; figure to yourself, Espérance, what my feelings were, as I waited to hear that awful sentence. But God heard my prayers. Victor was not shot, he was transported for life. I saw him again before his ship sailed, and then, though I was so thankful for his life, yet, *mon enfant*, it was very hard, very bitter. He supported me, however, he told me that this transportation was no real disgrace, that he had merely done what he considered his duty. But he could not hide his anguish at leaving France. I think that but for me he would rather have died, and one of the last things he said to me was, "Antoinette, I am thankful that the young De Mabillon is saved from this, I might have dragged him with me to his ruin, had he not been so shocked by the death of Clément Thomas."'

'Poor Monsieur, he was always so brave and good,' said Espérance, crying from sympathy. 'And you, dear Madame, what happened to you then?'

'For days, *mon enfant*, I was like one stupified, I could only look at the sea, and walk up and down the pier from which I had seen his ship sail. At last an English lady, who guessed I suppose that I was a relative of one of the emigrants, introduced herself to me as I was walking backwards and forwards distractedly one day. She found out my trouble, inquired what I meant to do, and showed me all possible kindness. I told her that I had scarcely any money, that I meant to get a situation as a governess if I could meet with one, and that in time I hoped to save

enough money to join my husband in his exile; not that I was very hopeful that day, for the hardships and sorrows had made me ill, and I half hoped I might die. But the lady, Mrs. Henderson, said that she knew of a situation in England which she thought would suit me, she herself was a widow, and had been helping in one of the ambulances during the war, she was now returning to England, and she kindly took me with her. The situation was with her brother-in-law, whom you have just now seen, to teach his little motherless girl Marguérite. There! *mon enfant*, I have told you all now.'

'Thank you, dear Madame. You have had terrible suffering indeed. You have not told me, though, where Mr. Henderson lives.'

'In Devonshire, *ma chère*—a very pretty estate of which Marguérite will be the heiress. We make now a tour in Wales, and are staying for a few days at Bangor.'

Frances, who had wandered away with the children, came back in time to hear this, and began to persuade Madame Lemercier to spend a day with them at Llanfairfechan.

'You are very good, it would make me much pleasure,' said Madame, 'but I think all the days are arranged; we go to-morrow to the Ogwen, and shall leave Bangor in two or three days.'

Frances was sorry, as she was sure Espérance would like to see more of Madame Lemercier; however, they had another long *tête-à-tête* when Mr. Henderson and his little girl returned, for Kathie was eager to have Maggie for a playfellow, and, with the boys for protectors, they were allowed to follow their own devices; while Mr. Henderson was delighted to find a kindred spirit in Frances, and talked for at least half-an-hour over his favourite hobby of ferns. It was not very often that he found a lady who

could so well enter into his talk on such matters, but Frances really knew a good deal on the subject, and had, moreover, a fernery of her own at Worthington, so she was interested in the discussion.

'I have been disappointed in not finding more of the parsley fern,' Mr. Henderson was saying. 'I had always heard of it as being so abundant in Wales.'

'My brother-in-law found any quantity growing on Snowdon,' said Frances. 'Have you been there yet?'

'No, but I had some thoughts of striking inland again in a day or two. I have promised to take my little girl to Llanberis. We might perhaps combine——Well, Maggie, what is it?' as the child ran up to him breathlessly.

'Oh, papa! we are so happy, and, do you know, Kathie Worthington is just my age—is it not funny?—and we mean always to be friends. And, papa, she has never been to Llanberis. Don't you think it would be very nice if we could go together?'

Mr. Henderson laughed.

'Children's thoughts run apace,' he said, glancing at Frances.

'Well, Maggie dear, we must see what Miss Neville says to this idea of yours. Run off now, and enjoy your play.'

The little girl ran away obediently, well content to leave things in her father's hands, and Mr. Henderson turned to Frances with a smile.

'They have already sworn an eternal friendship. Poor Maggie so seldom sees anyone of her own age, that the enjoyment is all the greater. It is very hard to find amusements for an only child; but since Madame Lemercier has been with us I think she has been much happier. A most invaluable lady she is, and very cheerful in spite of all her troubles.'

'There is a wonderful elasticity about the French,' said Frances, 'however much they are crushed down by trouble, they always seem to rise above it in time. I have noticed it very much in my little friend Espérance de Mabillon. I am so glad she chanced to meet Madame Lemercier to-day, it has been a great pleasure to her, I know.'

'Perhaps, after all, Maggie's wish would give pleasure to someone beside herself,' said Mr. Henderson, half hesitatingly. 'Would it be possible for us to join forces, Miss Neville, and make the excursion to Llanberis together?'

'It is very good of you to think of it,' said Frances; 'but we are such a large party we should only hamper you, and, indeed, I am half afraid it would be too tiring for our invalid.'

'There would be no walking,' explained Mr. Henderson, 'and Madame Lemercier would so much enjoy having her.'

'We will talk it over with her,' suggested Frances. 'It would be very delightful, and I know the boys are crazy to see Snowdon.'

'Ah! and we might look for the parsley fern,' said Mr. Henderson, returning to his pet subject. 'On the Capel Curig side I think you said it was to be found.'

Both Madame Lemercier and Espérance were so delighted with the idea of the Llanberis expedition, that Frances could hesitate no longer, and indeed, Espérance was looking so much better, and appeared so little tired with her walk up the glen, that there seemed no reason against trying the longer day. The whole party joined in a very merry tea drinking on the banks of the river, and in the cool of the evening walked down the glen, parting at the rest-house, after having arranged to meet on the following Monday at the Bangor station.

Espérance went about now with a radiant expression; the sight of Madame Lemercier's home-like face had made her feel much less forlorn, and she had greatly enjoyed their long talk together. Frances wrote glowing accounts to her sister of the very satisfactory recovery of their invalid, and Lady Worthington's prophecy seemed to be coming true, that if once they could get Espérance a thorough rest and change, she would probably be stronger after this illness than she had been for years. Now, for the first time since they had left Mabillon, her mind was really free from any pressing care; troubles, of course, she had and must have, but Gaspard's privations were at an end, and she was away from the frets and annoyances of the Deanery, among people who could love her and sympathise with her. Her strength returned rapidly, her spirits rose, and all the old cheerful courage, which had for a time seemed well-nigh crushed out of her, came back once more. Frances felt quite happy about her, for she knew that she was taking the present happiness as a preparation for the return to life at Rilchester, and she bent all her efforts to make the month in Wales as enjoyable as possible.

Monday proved to be one of those delicious days of early September, when even the most inveterate weather-grumbler cannot complain; a day of sunshine and soft breezy air, of blue sky and fleecy white clouds, a day, Espérance declared, on which it was impossible not to feel happy. The start was made early in the morning, Frances, with a sense of responsibility, driving with her four charges to the station, and feeling glad to have Espérance's help in keeping watch over the numerous possessions, ranging from butterfly-nets to air-cushions and luncheon-baskets.

Madame, Mr. Henderson, and Maggie, met them at

Bangor, and they went on by rail to Llanberis, the children in a state of uproarious merriment, Madame Lemercier and Espérance talking and gesticulating, and Frances and Mr. Henderson finding plenty of time for almost equally animated conversation. At Llanberis there was a division, Mr. Henderson well armed with oilskin bags and fern-trowels preparing to go up Snowdon, with Fred and Harry as companions, while the rest of the party arranged themselves in a capacious waggonette and drove up the Pass. Maggie, who had a good deal of romance in her disposition, insisted on telling them all the legend of Dolbadarn Castle, and, indeed, it was partly owing to her pity and admiration for the beautiful heroine, Margaret, that she had been so very anxious to come to Llanberis.

Espérance listened half dreamily, but could not bring herself to associate anything sad with the surrounding beauty—the ruined tower, the calm lake, the rugged granite-crowned mountains, were too restfully beautiful, too calmly grand, she could not think of the past at all, and Maggie could not win her sympathy for the tragedy of poor Margaret.

They drove slowly on, the pass getting more wild and rugged, and in one of the grandest, most desolate-looking spots, were surprised to see two or three cottages nestled down among the wide-scattered granite blocks, and to be greeted by 'Ar Hyd-y-Nos,' that most pathetic of all airs, chanted by some little bright-eyed children, with the sweetness and inborn pathos which seems to characterise Welsh singing. Then on again into perfect stillness, amid the green of the grass and the ever-varying hues of the granite, now black and frowning, now shining like silver in the sunlight, till at length they reached Pen-y-pas, and were glad to get out of the carriage, and rest among the surrounding loveliness.

Espérance was very happy, and, though she could not join in any of the climbings of the rest of the party, the afternoon did not seem the least long to her; she lay in a shady corner and gazed down the Pass, seeing all manner of fresh beauties in its rugged grandeur, and making the view thoroughly her own. Then, from time to time, Maggie and Kathie would bring her treasures, bright pieces of spar, or handfuls of heather and ling, or Frances and Madame Lemercier would bring back glowing descriptions of some fresh view which they had found. Later in the day Madame settled herself down for another long chat, and Espérance had still many questions to ask and inquiries to make after her Parisian acquaintances. Even if Madame had not been so kind and lovable, she must have enjoyed talking with anyone who had known her father and Gaspard, and poor old Javotte; and, though most of the recollections they had in common were sad ones, there was a strange pleasure in dwelling on them.

Soon after four o'clock the Snowdon party arrived, having had a very successful day. The boys were so ravenous that tea was obliged to be hurried, and Madame Lemercier and Espérance, who had learnt all sorts of little devices in the siege, managed everything most daintily, while Mr. Henderson and Frances examined the ferns, and were so much engrossed in their conversation that they continued it all through the picnic meal, leaving Fred and Harry to describe the glories of Snowdon to the rest of the party.

Then came the preparations for the return, the drive down the Pass, where already the shades were deepening, the merry railway journey, and a general regret as the farewells were said at the Bangor station. Maggie and Kathie were already arranging to write to each other;

Madame Lemercier and Espérance indulged in fervent embraces, and a torrent of rapidly uttered French; but perhaps Mr. Henderson was the gravest and most regretful of all as the train moved off, and he raised his hat to Frances Neville.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

'Go, to the world return, nor fear to cast
Thy bread upon the waters, sure at last
In joy to find it after many days.
The work be thine, the fruit thy children's part:
Choose to believe, not see; sight tempts the heart
From sober walking in true Gospel ways.'

KEBLE.

MRS. MORTLAKE had just returned from Scarborough, and, to tell the truth, she was not sorry to be in Rilchester again, for she had found two months at the watering-place rather dull. She was fond of society, and had been disappointed that scarcely any of her acquaintance had come to the place, while Bella had been cutting her seven-year-old teeth, and had been unusually fractious. On the whole, Mrs. Mortlake did not feel the better for her summer outing, and as she sat in the breakfast-room at the Deanery one sunny September morning, her face bore a more than usually dissatisfied expression. She was waiting for her father and Cornelia, and, although the gong had twice sounded, and the breakfast was growing cold, they still lingered over their letters in the library. Mrs. Mortlake, with growing dissatisfaction, cut the leaves of the *Guardian*, and read the list of preferments, glanced through the topics of the week, skimmed the correspondence, counted the number of ladies wanting cooks, yawned repeatedly, and finally, with an impatient

exclamation, rose and crossed the hall to the library to remonstrate with the Dean.

'My dear father, breakfast has been ready for half-an-hour,' she said, in a reproachful tone. 'Surely these letters can wait.'

Cornelia looked up; her face wore a startled, agitated expression.

'What is it, Christabel? Breakfast, did you say? Yes, I will come. You would like a cup of tea in here, quietly, would you not?' she said, turning to the Dean.

He assented, but did not look up, and Christabel, full of curiosity, hastened back to the breakfast-room, wondering what bad news the post could have brought. She fancied it must be in some way connected with the De Mabillons; no doubt her father would feel it a good deal now if either Gaspard or Espérance met with any disaster, but, after all, need he reproach himself? He had been very liberal, and they were only cousins. Children and grandchildren certainly ought to be the first consideration.

She had made so sure that the trouble was connected with her cousins, that she was doubly startled by Cornelia's abrupt utterance as she came into the room, closing the door behind her.

'Well, Christabel, I don't know what is to be done; George Palgrave has proposed to Bertha.'

'To Bertha!' exclaimed Mrs. Mortlake; 'how altogether absurd. He must have known my father would not allow it.'

'On the contrary,' said Cornelia, 'they don't seem to have the least idea that he will object. George writes very properly, apologising for having spoken to Bertha before he had asked father's leave, and explaining how it was that he was betrayed into a confession of his love before he had intended. It seems that he went to see grannie

at St. Leonards, and found Bertha staying there; they were a great deal thrown together, and you know what grannie is when she gets young people with her, she did nothing but plan excursions for them, and kept George hanging about the place, till this was the result.'

'What will father do?'

'He can only write to George, and refuse his consent. Bertha, poor child, must come home at once; I am afraid we have been partly to blame in this, we ought to have spoken to her in the summer, only of course I always thought she looked upon him as a sort of substitute for a brother,'

'Of course,' said Mrs. Mortlake, 'I have no patience with her, she must have known that my father would never tolerate such a thing. A poor man and a cousin—preposterous!'

'Do not be hard on her,' said Cornelia, pityingly, 'I feel as if it were all my fault for not speaking to her, and now she will have such sorrow, poor child.'

Cornelia was unusually tender-hearted this morning, she was thinking of an episode in her own life, years and years ago, when love and happiness had seemed just within her reach, and had been suddenly snatched from her, leaving her chilled and embittered. Her heart ached for poor Bertha.

Mrs. Mortlake was more angry than pitiful.

'We have Espérance to thank for this,' she said in her vexed voice. 'No doubt it was all brought on by that visit to the Palgraves in the summer. I knew no good would ever come of it, when my father adopted that child.'

'That is sheer nonsense,' said Cornelia, in her abrupt way. 'The only thing I do regret a little, is, that you have taken away Espérance's attic, and put her in Bertha's room—the child will want to be alone.'

'On the contrary I think it will be very good for her to have a companion, Espérance's chatter will keep her from brooding over her troubles, besides I asked her in my last letter, and she made no objection. The attic makes a capital play-room for Bella.'

Cornelia did not care to continue the conversation, and soon left the table to begin the difficult task of writing to Bertha, which Mrs. Mortlake altogether declined.

Bertha came home the next day, and early in the following week Espérance also returned. Frances Neville was coming back with the children to Worthington, so she was able to take her home in her carriage. Espérance had made up her mind to be very brave, she had even persuaded herself that she rather wished to get back to the discipline of Rilchester, that she was anxious to be at work again after her long holiday; but in spite of this her heart sank, when she found herself once more alone in the dimly-lighted hall of the Deanery. The Dean and Miss Collinson were at afternoon service, the footman told her, and Mrs. Mortlake had visitors in the drawing-room, then he carried her trunk upstairs and disappeared.

Espérance stood quite still, as if anxious to face her position. Her eyes wandered from the blue-and-white tiled floor to the frosted windows, up the dark oak staircase, and round the wainscotted walls, and she shivered a little as she remembered that this was a 'coming home.' She looked at the pictures of the Dean's predecessors, and fancied they looked down at her pityingly, while the brown, glassy eyes of two stags' heads looked almost tearful, and seemed to say, 'We are sorry for you, we too are prisoners, out of our natural element.'

She felt the tears gathering in her own eyes, and with an impatient exclamation roused herself, and went upstairs to her room. Forlorn and uncomfortable as it had been,

she received a sharp pang when she found that the attic was no longer hers; it was all strewn with toys, Bella was in one of the corners, beating a refractory doll, and her nurse was working near the window.

She rose, and received Espérance with inquiries after her health, and a warmth of welcome which in the present chilliness of her feelings was really comforting. Bella, too, who was always much better behaved when away from her mother, ran up to kiss her, and by the time the explanation of the change of rooms had been made, Espérance had quite recovered her spirits. She ran downstairs to Bertha's room, and knocked at the door.

Bertha was sitting at her table writing, she put down her pen, but Espérance was across the room in one bound, and had both arms round her neck before she could rise. She submitted to one of those warm, clinging French embraces, which Espérance was wont to give her, then said in her quiet, impassive voice, 'I did not know you had come.'

'I have been here five minutes, and not a soul have I seen except Bella and nurse—just think of that! You will have to kiss me for all the rest of the family.'

'You look much better,' said Bertha, still very languidly.

'Yes, I am quite well, it is you who look like the invalid. What is it, Bertha? I am sure you are ill!'

But she was not prepared for a sudden outburst of tears from her usually reserved cousin. Bertha had in truth found Espérance's endearments too much for her. In a few minutes she had, whether wisely or not, sobbed out the whole story to this most sympathetic of auditors. It had been no comfort to her to speak of it to the others. She had sat in one of the great library chairs, and heard her father express his slow, hesitating regrets that he was

obliged to cross her wishes, and only grown more heavy-hearted. She had listened to Mrs. Mortlake as she sat over her bazaar work, showing the many worldly advantages she would have lost had she been able to marry George Palgrave, and had hurried away, at once sore-hearted and angry. She had seen Cornelia in her study, and had only listened to her grave words of pity, with a conviction that her sister had never experienced this kind of sorrow, and had no right to talk. Now, with a sense of relief, she told all to one who would sympathise without reproof, who would not add to her distress by saying, 'You ought to have known.'

And, luckily, Espérance was a safe comforter. She did not say, as some girls of seventeen would have done, 'Perhaps your father will change his mind or relent.' She was so accustomed to think of a father's slightest wish as law, that this did not even enter her head, all her sympathy was expressed either by outward demonstration, or by soft, loving, pitiful ejaculations, yet Bertha was really comforted.

They went downstairs together, and Espérance received a kind greeting from her uncle and Cornelia, and a cold kiss from Mrs. Mortlake; there were some inquiries after her health, and a little conversation about Welsh scenery, and then she settled down into her old niche at the Deanery.

The old place, and yet certainly things were different now, and Espérance herself was much changed. She did not cease to feel Mrs. Mortlake's snubs, but she would not allow herself to dwell upon them, and Cornelia was so much kinder and less sarcastic than she had been, that her study became a kind of refuge, though in the old times Espérance had regarded it rather as a hornet's nest where one was always liable to be stung.

She was constantly on the look-out for little ways of helping Cornelia now, for she had a vivid remembrance of her kindness to Gaspard, and the trouble she had taken during her illness; and Cornelia was not insensible to the attentions she received—it was pleasant to her to find the holes in her gloves attended to, her pencils ready sharpened, and her pens mended—it was also a comfort to the tempers of both teacher and pupil, that the actual lessons were ended, and an hour or two of solid reading substituted.

Bertha, too, was a constant interest, she was much more loving and dependent now, and Espérance was so sorry for her in her trouble that she learnt to love her more than ever, and forgot her own sorrows in trying to comfort her.

So the autumn passed away, and the frosty weather set in; furs and winter wraps were brought out, housekeepers thought of their plum puddings and mince-meat, and Lady Worthington began to arrange the Christmas festivities.

'We must have a dance,' she said to her sister, one December morning. 'A delightfully mixed dance, to which all Rilchester shall be invited, from the Cathedral dignitaries down to Mr. Jones's dispenser. I do like everybody to be happy, and for once all the cliques will be fused.'

'They will keep in their own sets I fancy,' said Frances, 'whatever you do.'

'Well, we shall do our best,' said Lady Worthington, hopefully, 'and at any rate they will be all under one roof, dancing to the same music—surely that will establish a sort of fraternity? Claude Magnay will be here, too, and he knows everybody, and will dance with anyone; and Henry will have some of his cousins down here. We can do a good deal you see, with our own party.'

'When does Claude come?'

'On the 23rd, and he has solemnly promised that he will not overwork himself, as he did last year, and disappoint us just at the last moment. I have set my heart upon having him for this dance.'

'To dance with the Miss Smiths?' said Frances, laughing.

'Yes, to be useful, and to brighten everybody up. It does one good to look at Claude, specially when he is in a holiday humour. He is the most unspoiled genius I ever knew, and so delightfully fresh and young still.'

'Yes, he does not look four-and-twenty. By-the-by, will not Espérance come out this winter?'

'I should think so, and we must have her to this dance, whether or no. Let us write the invitations now, and we will send her a separate one, so that Mrs. Mortlake shall not have a chance of preventing her acceptance.'

'You most cunning Katharine, I should never have thought of that.'

'My dear, one must be careful with such people as Mrs. Mortlake, I do not trust her in the least.'

The invitations were received at the Deanery with much satisfaction. Mrs. Mortlake did indeed demur whether Espérance were old enough to go, but Cornelia was determined that she should have this pleasure, and made her write to accept it, even condescending to talk of such trivial matters as ball-dresses in order to please her.

It seemed likely to be what everyone called an old-fashioned Christmas, for on the 23rd there was a heavy fall of snow, and Claude Magnay, as he travelled down to Rilchester, was not sorry to find the usually bare, bleak country beautified by this white covering.

On Christmas Eve, Lady Worthington seemed bent upon making him useful, and allowed him to be her slave

through a morning of church decorating. In the afternoon a *contretemps* arose. It was snowing so fast, and the roads were so bad, that the coachman protested it was impossible to take out the horses.

Lady Worthington was greatly distressed.

'But I really must go in to Rilchester,' she said, with concern. 'There are not half enough things for the school-children's Christmas tree, it is as bare as can be; and besides, ten new children came to school last Sunday, and I have no presents for them.'

'They probably joined for the treat, my dear,' said Sir Henry.

'Well, I can't help that, they must have something, poor little things. Surely Jenkins makes too much fuss about the roads?'

'I shall be very happy to walk in to Rilchester,' said Claude, 'if I can be trusted to choose the things.'

'That is very good of you,' said Lady Worthington, 'but I am not quite sure that I could trust you, Claude. I believe you would ruin me, you would not buy anything that was not highly artistic. But if you will walk in with me we might really manage something together.'

So the matter was arranged, and Lady Worthington and her companion started at once on their snowy expedition, rather enjoying the novelty of trudging along country roads, with a keen north wind driving the snowflakes in their faces. They shopped continuously for two hours, and it was quite dusk before they turned home again; but buying Christmas presents is tiring work, and the air was intensely cold. Lady Worthington paused involuntarily as they passed the gateway of the Vicar's Court.

'What do you say to a cup of tea, Claude, and just a few minutes by a fire, before we leave the town? I am

sure the Dean would be delighted to see you, and Mrs. Mortlake's tea is excellent.'

Claude thought the idea a good one, and certainly it was a relief even to stand in the shelter of the Deanery porch, for the night was bitterly cold.

When the door was thrown open, a pretty picture was revealed. The hall was brightly lighted, the tiled floor was strewn with holly and evergreens, Bertha stood in the background struggling with some tough sprays of yew, while Espérance sat at the top of a pair of steps, putting the finishing touches to a wreath for one of the pictures.

She sprang down in a great hurry on seeing the visitors, and Lady Worthington kissed her affectionately, while Claude looked and wondered. His 'Mariana' was gone! this glowing-complexioned child of the south, with her innocent wavy hair and her bright eyes, was not 'Mariana' at all. Was it possible that it was indeed Espérance?

He still gazed and wondered. Espérance half put out her hand, then drew it back, a little vexed that he had so evidently forgotten her.

'My uncle will be delighted to see you, Mr. Magnay,' she said, with a charming little touch of *hauteur*.

Claude started, as if from a dream, and the two shook hands warmly.

'A thousand pardons!—but you are so altered that I hardly recognised you.'

'Ah! it is my short hair,' said Espérance, colouring and laughing.

Claude did not contradict her, but in reality it was the change in her expression which he meant. 'Mariana' had fascinated him, but this was something far higher! He longed for fresh opportunities of studying her face, so bewitching, whether in its sweet gravity or its smiling radiance and animation.

'I hope you have good accounts of your brother,' he said, delighting in the swift kindling of the eyes at his words.

'Yes, Gaspard is very well,' she replied, 'I hear from him every week, such long letters, too, almost like a journal.'

'And does he like his work?'

'Very much indeed. He has to superintend the coolies you know, and see that they work well, he is out of doors all day long, and is getting so strong and well again. I always feel when I read his letters how very much we owe to you and Sir Henry Worthington, I have always longed to tell you how very, very grateful I was, and Gaspard told me it was quite your doing that he came to Rilchester—it was so good of you to send him, it made the parting so much less bitter.'

There was deep gratitude in her expression, just touched with sadness, then in a moment she smiled again, that pure, radiant, winning smile. Claude felt as if he were in some delicious dream—he made some brief response, he hardly knew what, and then Espérance spoke again.

'There is tea in the drawing-room, will you not come in? you must be very cold after your long walk.'

Claude rubbed his snowy shoes on the mat, and followed her into the almost oppressively hot drawing-room, where he was warmly received by the rest of the family. He was a favourite with the Dean, and was at once pounced upon to listen to something about the planet Mars, and some late improvements which had been made in the telescope, and fortunately the Dean was too much engrossed to notice that Claude's answers were vague and monosyllabic, or to perceive that he was bestowing all his attention on Espérance.

He did not speak to her much more that evening. Lady Worthington soon rose to go, and he was glad to hear her say to Espérance, 'We shall see you then on Thursday evening, mind you come in good time.'

Espérance promised, smiling, and then she followed them into the hall, picking up her fallen wreath, and standing in the doorway to wish them good-bye, in spite of the cold.

Claude walked away in silence, treasuring up his last vision of her as she stood on the white doorstep, holding her holly-wreath. He began to think less about painting her. What if he could make her his own, not artistically but in reality! What if he could shield her from some of the sharp, piercing sorrows of this wintry world!

'Well, Claude, you found your "Mariana" a good deal changed, did you not?' said Lady Worthington.

'Quite; it is an angel face now,' and Claude did not speak again, but fell into a deep reverie, and Lady Worthington did not disturb him.

He was startled to find how strongly this new thought possessed him, he could not believe that but a brief hour ago he had been living without it, carelessly walking through the Rilchester streets without even a thought that he was near Espérance.

And yet it seemed to him that this was merely a revelation, that he had really loved her since he first saw her, more than a year ago. He tried to recall her as she was then, the little, black-robed figure, with mournful look, and wondering, interest-craving eyes, in the choir aisle; the sad, wistful face, colouring at the accusation of admiring only Boulevards, in the dining-room of the Deanery; the drooping hopelessness and tearful eyes that had inspired him for his 'Mariana,' and that last time when he had interrupted Mrs. Mortlake's scolding—the

despairing look, and quivering lips. All these images rose before him, they were as so many steps in his love, but without to-day's vision of sweet, patient hope, they would have led to nothing. But now! He thought once more of the little brown hands holding the prickly wreath, of the dainty little feet on the slippery doorstep, and felt that such things were unsuitable to them. Espérance ought to be watched over, guarded, caressed, she should not be left alone in the world.

He was strangely absorbed that evening, alternating between complete silence and excited merriment; when anyone spoke of the Deanery, or of Espérance, his face would suddenly wear an eager, expectant look, but he himself never mentioned her. Sir Henry proposed a rubber, however Claude was not fond of whist, and to-night felt that it would be impossible to play; the quartette was made up without him, and he leant back again in his chair with a newspaper of which he did not read a single word. Frances was playing the 'Moonlight Sonata,' how could he help dreaming of Espérance?

By-and-by he left the room, and Lady Worthington coming downstairs from tucking up her children, found him in the hall standing before his own picture of 'Mariana.' He was too much absorbed to notice her presence until she spoke.

'Espérance is very much altered since you painted that.'

He started at the first word, and coloured a little, 'Yes,' he replied, 'I was just noticing what a difference there was—yet I don't think this was at all exaggerated at the time.'

He moved away not feeling inclined to talk upon that subject just then, and Lady Worthington said nothing, but she had her own thoughts.

CHAPTER XXIX.

'Bonnie wee thing, cannie wee thing,
Lovely wee thing, wast thou mine
I wad wear thee in my bosom,
Lest my jewel I should tine.

Wistfully I look and languish
In that bonnie face of thine,
And my heart it stounds with anguish,
Lest my wee thing be na mine.' BURNS.

BERTHA and Espérance were in their room dressing for Lady Worthington's dance, they were both of them quiet and a little depressed, for Bertha naturally thought of the ball in the summer, when George had been staying with them and all had been so different, and Espérance had her own troubles. It had been a harassing day. Mrs. Mortlake was in a bad humour, and Bella was suffering from the effects of her Christmas dissipation, and was more than ordinarily peevish; then, too, she had been hindered in writing to Gaspard, and had missed the mail, and though as Mrs. Mortlake had reminded her the letter could go the next day viâ Brindisi, yet the weekly postage told so heavily on her purse, that this was an expense she did not at all care to incur.

The uninterrupted quiet of the room was at last broken by a knock at the door, and Cornelia entered in her black velvet, carrying some sprigs of holly.

'I am so vexed,' she said, putting down her prickly burden on the dressing-table. 'I wanted you to have had one of those white camellias in the conservatory, Espérance, but Christabel has taken them both, and declares that they are the only things she can wear.'

Espérance was a little disappointed, she had set her heart on one of the camellias, but she was too grateful to Cornelia for thinking of it at all, not to make light of the matter.

They did what they could with the holly sprigs, but even Espérance's clever fingers could not effect much with them, they would look stiff and uncompromising. The ivy, too, was large-leaved and ugly, and altogether the decorations were unsuccessful, which was the more provoking because she was entirely dependent on them, having no jewellery.

Her vexation was but momentary, however, she soon forgot it in helping Bertha, and she arranged the white camellias in Mrs. Mortlake's hair without the least tinge of envy.

Then they all started, and her spirits rose high with the prospect of this novelty and excitement, she chattered uninterruptedly through the two miles' drive, till even Bertha was a little roused and began to take some slight interest in what was going on.

There was no one in the cloak-room when they arrived, and Espérance had just taken off her wraps when Frances' little maid appeared—'Miss Neville would be very glad if Mdlle. de Mabillon would come into the school-room for a moment.'

'To say good-night to the children I suppose, you will not wait for me, Cornelia? I can come down with Frances.'

Cornelia nodded assent, and Espérance followed the maid to the school-room; but none of the children were there, only Frances and Claude Magnay, bending over a most lovely basketful of ferns and flowers.

'I am so glad you have come early,' Frances said, kissing her. 'Mr. Magnay has been spoiling us all, he walked over to the nursery gardens this morning, and

brought home the most beautiful flowers, and we want you to wear some of them.'

Claude was glad to have it put in this way, for having spent the morning in scouring Rilchester in search of these flowers for Espérance, he now hardly liked to offer them.

Her delighted gratitude was very charming, and Claude coloured deeply, as for a moment her beautiful eyes met his.

'How kind of you! and how lovely they are!' she exclaimed rapturously, 'you can't think how much I wanted a flower, holly is so prickly.'

Frances began to take the flowers from the basket, and Espérance struggled to take off her sprigs of holly, but could not manage it with her gloves on. Claude was delighted at this excuse for helping her, and took away the sharp leaves and scarlet berries with unmixed satisfaction.

'You must enact M. Wörth, Claude,' said Frances, looking up. 'Now, Espérance, stand still, and we shall hear exactly where your flowers are to be placed.'

She obeyed half laughingly, and Claude surveyed her in silence, thinking but little of the flowers it must be confessed. She had never looked prettier than at that moment, standing in her unadorned white dress, her lips just parted, her eyes smiling half shyly, her cheeks glowing with rich brown-red colour, and the outline of the shapely little head not at all veiled by the short, tendril-like curls which clustered round her neck, and overshadowed her low, smooth forehead.

Claude was recalled to his duties by her clear, ringing laugh.

'It is as bad as having one's photograph taken,' she said, 'I am sure M. Wörth does not keep his ladies so long.'

'The oracle is dumb,' said Claude, smiling. 'Shall we try the effect of Christmas roses and maiden-hair, Miss Neville?'

So the dress was beautified with the exquisite white flowers, and drooping lady-ferns, and light feathery maiden-hair, but 'M. Wörth' did stipulate that the curls should be left as they were, in their unadorned beauty.

Then they went downstairs to the great drawing-room, which had been turned out for the occasion, and where many of the guests were already assembled. Lady Worthington was at the door and came into the hall to meet them, stooping down to kiss Espérance in defiance of custom.

'You have come in the character of the Christmas rose,' she said, glancing at the happy, glowing face, 'you will be just in time for the first dance, Claude will take you in to Mrs. Mortlake.' Claude assented, and led her across the brightly lighted room to the sofa where Mrs. Mortlake and Cornelia were seated, and Espérance began to tell of the surprise that had awaited her in the schoolroom, and to show the flowers exultingly. Cornelia smiled kindly.

'She was disappointed of the flowers at home, but these are far lovelier,' she said to Claude, while Mrs. Mortlake began abruptly to speak to her next neighbour.

He made some trifling response, and then turned eagerly to Espérance, fearful that someone else might be before him in asking her to dance. Cornelia watched her in secret admiration as she was borne swiftly away, her pure, childlike happiness was delightful to see; as they passed the sofa every few minutes she caught a few words of French, and knew that Claude was talking to her in her own language, and once when they paused for a minute's rest Espérance came to her, eager for sympathy.

'It is so delightful, Cornelia, and is not this "Blue Danube" waltz a capital one?'

Cornelia could not understand the delights of a *trois temps*, she had never cared for dancing, or any kind of exercise, but she liked being appealed to in this way, and watched her little cousin with a certain comfortable sense of pride and possession. This child whom she had nursed and tended was beginning to make large demands on her love.

Claude meantime was perfectly happy, his diffidence soon vanished under the influence of Espérance's *naïve* remarks and free simplicity, and very soon they drifted into their former habits of easy, half-confidential talk, though Claude was more reverential and less pitying than he had been in old times.

He would have liked to prolong their dance indefinitely, but Espérance had not come simply to enjoy herself, and he was obliged to resign her to Fred, who came up with such an entreaty that he could not be resisted—everyone was so stupid, they would not dance with him, and would Espérance have him just this once? Of course she consented, and when Fred, proud and happy, had brought her back to Cornelia, she was at once pursued by Harry, who would not be content till he had written his name in unsteady round-hand on her programme.

She danced with Claude, however, several times, only refusing him once when she wanted to sit out with Cornelia, who was having rather a dull time. Claude divined her motive, and loved her all the better for it, even accepting the hint she gave him to dance with Bertha, though it took him away from her to a most indifferent set of quadrilles, in which everyone danced languidly. He was rewarded, however, later in the evening by another waltz with her; as they were walking up and down the hall

after it was over he stopped for a moment before 'Mariana.'

'I want you to look at this for a minute,' he said; 'it is one of my pictures.'

She looked up eagerly.

'A new one of yours? I had not seen it—why, she is just like Gaspard! that is exactly how he looked after the capitulation.'

Claude was much amused, and would not perhaps have explained further had she not put a direct question.

'Did you get the idea from Gaspard?'

'No,' he replied, smiling. 'Your brother saw the picture when it was done, and I made my confession to him then. It was your face which inspired me.'

'Mine! how very funny!' cried Espérance, with her irresistible laugh. 'Do you mean that this is really meant for me, and that I have been in the Academy without knowing it? Ah! that is amusing! that is ridiculous!'

'I am afraid it was a great liberty,' said Claude, 'but I could not resist the temptation; perhaps some day you will really give me a sitting, I should not paint you as "Mariana" now.'

'Why not?' asked Espérance, 'because I have lost my hair?'

'No,' said Claude, hesitating a little, 'because you have not "Mariana's" expression now. "Mariana" never grew bright, and patient, and hopeful, she must have grown bitter in her loneliness instead of sweet.'

He paused, half afraid he had said too much, but Espérance was not thinking of herself. She was looking at the picture.

'How dreary you have made the fen look; I like that dull, watery reflection of the moonlight, and the torn curtain, and that worm-eaten window-frame—ah! it is

wonderfully done! How sad she looks, too, so weary and so disappointed.' Then, with a sudden smile, 'Surely I never looked so despairing?'

'You used to look very miserable,' said Claude.

'Ah! and I was miserable, that was just the time when I was most home-sick and unhappy; how I did hate Rilchester.'

'You do not dislike it now, then?'

'No, I believe I am really growing fond of it,' she answered, smiling. 'I wonder whether you know our proverb, "*Quand on n'a pas ce que l'on aime, il faut aimer ce que l'on a.*" I think it is one of the wisest of sayings, and really it answers.'

She had applied the proverb only to places, but Claude felt sure that she really referred to people as well. She was schooling herself to love her English relations, was it not evident? If not, why had she taken pains to secure a partner for Bertha, or lingered talking with Cornelia, or answered Mrs. Mortlake's disagreeable questions so pleasantly?

Just then Christabel appeared.

'You are very imprudent to stand in that draught, Espérance,' she said coldly.

'Would you have liked your shawl?' asked Claude. 'Pray let me fetch it.'

'We are going, thank you,' said Mrs. Mortlake; 'so do not trouble, only people who are always complaining of the cold should use common sense in——'

Her words were checked by Sir Henry Worthington, who suddenly emerged from the door of the billiard-room.

'Why, Mrs. Mortlake, you are leaving us very early.'

She was at once all smiles and courtesy. Claude hated her, and gnawed the ends of his moustache fiercely, till Espérance's voice recalled him from his angry thoughts.

'I think it is wonderful,' she said, taking a farewell look at 'Mariana.' 'I am so glad you told me all about it. Are you painting anything while you are here?'

'No, I go back to town to-morrow,' said Claude, rather wistfully; 'this has only been a few days' holiday. Will you really keep your promise some time, and give me a sitting?'

'Yes, indeed, but what will you paint me as?'

'As an angel, I think,' said Claude, gravely.

She laughed uncontrollably, and was so much amused by the idea that she would talk of nothing else while he was helping her with her cloak; but just as they were passing through the hall again on their way to the carriage, she half raised her scarf and showed him the Christmas roses.

'Your flowers are quite fresh still,' she said, glancing up at him half shyly.

And Claude was more thrilled by those words, than by all her former thanks. 'Your flowers'—she called them his, and she wore them. Her hand lay in his for a moment as he helped her into the carriage with elaborate care, then the footman closed the door with vicious speed, and the coachman urged on the horses. Claude felt desperate, he must see her once more, this was the last chance for an indefinite time, for he was to leave too early the following day for a call at the Deanery to be possible. Regardless of the snow, he hurried out all bareheaded as he was, threaded his way among the crowd of carriages, and ran full speed across the park to the lodge gate; it was a short cut over the grass, and he easily outstripped the Deanery carriage; leaning breathlessly against the gate-post, he waited till the sound of wheels drew nearer, and the yellow lamps flashed into sight, the horses slackened their pace a little at the turn, and for an instant he had

what he longed for, a last look at Espérance. She did not see him, and he wished she would raise her eyes just for a moment from something she was looking at earnestly, but a sudden sense of gladness filled his heart, when, as the carriage turned into the road, the light fell for a minute on her hands, and he saw that she was holding a Christmas rose.

Lady Worthington was no match-maker, and although the union of her two favourite *protégés* could not but suggest itself to her, she would not allow the idea to influence her words or actions; nor, although she strongly suspected that Claude had fallen in love with his former ideal, would she make the slightest effort to win his confidence. He left the Hall on the following day without saying a word to her, and although she was a little curious, she wisely kept silence, not even talking the matter over with Frances.

Claude went back to town, and worked hard at his painting, but owing to the short winter days much of his time was necessarily unoccupied, and his thoughts were constantly reverting to Espérance. He took a fancy for going to the afternoon service at the Abbey, that he might be hearing exactly what she was hearing; he took in the *Guardian* and searched the columns anxiously for anything relating to Rilchester. The very name of Dean Collinson was sufficient to set all his pulses throbbing, and he took the most lively interest in all the special preachers mentioned, men whom Espérance had seen, perhaps shaken hands with.

This did all very well for a time; parliament was opened, and the Worthingtons returned to town. There was plenty going on, the days were growing longer, but yet as the spring advanced Claude grew more and more restless; the brief allusions in the *Guardian* became only

tantalising, the Westminster services no longer satisfied him—he could not even succeed in drawing Espérance's face from memory, and had it not been for the hope that he might really be working for her, his pictures would have suffered considerably.

The opening of the Academy gave him some satisfaction. Two of his pictures were on the line, and were very favourably spoken of in the critiques. He wondered if Espérance ever read the papers, if by chance she would see those 'Academy Notes.' By the third week in May both his works were sold. Evidently his reputation was greatly increased, and he felt a certain sense of pleasure, but his restlessness only grew greater. At length he resolved that he would tell all to Lady Worthington, feeling sure that she would be both a safe and a sympathetic confidante.

Sacrificing for this purpose even the afternoon light, he started early in hope of finding Lady Worthington disengaged, and before three o'clock was shown upstairs to her drawing-room. The room was empty, and he had some minutes to wait. He stood in one of the windows and looked out on Kensington Gardens, abstractedly watching the procession of nursemaids and children, and the bright sunlight flickering through the fresh green of the trees on to the brown paths below. Then Lady Worthington came in with her hearty greeting, and he was roused from his reverie.

'I was wondering what had become of you, Claude, you have not been here for weeks, and I actually heard of your successes in the Academy from someone else.'

'I should have come before, but the truth is I have not been out much lately, I have had a good deal on hand,' said Claude, rather hesitatingly.

'And that is the reason you are declining so many invitations? Two or three people have been quite dis-

tressed, I know, by your refusals. You are a "lion" now, you see, and a lion should be gracious, I think. You must be working too hard.'

'I know I deserve a scolding,' said Claude; 'but I have not been in the humour for gaieties; it is not that I am doing too much—I can't plead that as an excuse, but——'

'But you are getting *blasé* at four-and-twenty, is that it?'

Claude did not answer for a moment. He moved restlessly, deliberating whether he should tell all to Lady Worthington or not, then looking up suddenly and turning his eager eyes fully on her, he said, abruptly, 'The fact is, Lady Worthington, that visit to you at Christmas quite unhinged me—it was a revelation to me, and now I am wild to get to Rilchester once more. You know what I mean?'

'I think I do,' said Lady Worthington, kindly, 'and I am very glad, Claude.'

'You think, then, there is really some hope for me?'

'I do not see why there should not be,' said Lady Worthington; 'but you will not do anything in a hurry. If you will let me give you a piece of advice, I should say write to her brother before you breathe a word to her about it, for I know the French are very particular about such things.'

'I thought I could speak to the Dean, but the worst of it is, I don't think it will be any use, she would only be startled and repulsed. I must see her again. If only I had the faintest shadow of an excuse for going to Rilchester I would start to-morrow, but there is none; and she will forget me, or someone else will——'

'Come,' said Lady Worthington, smiling, 'I don't think you need make yourself miserable about that. I

suppose if I were prudent I should tell you to wait till next Christmas, and then to come down to Worthington and see if you were in the same mind.'

'I have waited all these months already,' said Claude, pleadingly; 'and you don't know what it is to think of her in that wretched place, among people who don't care for her.'

'She is fast making them care for her,' said Lady Worthington; 'but for all that, I can understand that it is hard for you. Suppose I am imprudent, and ask you to go down to Rilchester at once, and paint me a very beautiful picture in the Cathedral. I think I should like it to be in the south aisle.'

'You are too good,' said Claude, earnestly; 'but I ought not to have everything made easy for me.'

'No, seriously, I should like the picture, I commission you now, Mr. Magnay, if it is not trespassing too much on your valuable time. Shall I stipulate how many feet of canvas you are to cover, like that interesting manufacturer we heard of the other day, who ordered pictures by the yard?'

Claude laughed and reiterated his thanks, and Lady Worthington spoke more seriously.

'I do wish you all possible success,' she said, earnestly. 'I shall wait very anxiously to hear of the result, and you will come and see me when you return.'

Claude promised to do so, and just at that moment some other visitors arrived, and he hastily took leave.

To have an excuse for a fortnight's visit to Rilchester seemed to him the greatest bliss. He longed to start that very moment, but a perverse engagement on the next afternoon prevented this, and he could not possibly reach Rilchester before the last train; but he should see her in two days' time, and with this he might well be content.

CHAPTER XXX.

'Oft though Wisdom wakes, Suspicion sleeps
At Wisdom's gate, and to Simplicity resigns her charge,
While goodness thinks no ill
Where no ill seems.' *Paradise Lost.*

THE arrival of the post-bag at the Deanery was a source of mingled pleasure and vexation; the Dean always disliked letters, and Cornelia thought them tiresome though necessary evils, but the other members of the family regarded them in a very different way, and were apt to grumble if Cornelia was at all late in bringing the key, and dispensing them to their owners.

It was Monday afternoon, and Espérance was waiting impatiently in the drawing-room, expecting the arrival of the post with her weekly letter from Gaspard; she was reading aloud to Bertha, not very well it must be confessed, for her eyes and ears were alive to the slightest sign which might indicate the arrival of her letter, and when Cornelia at last entered the room, she sprang forward, waiting with eager impatience while the bag was opened. There were only two letters, one from Ceylon, which Espérance seized eagerly, another for Bertha.

'It is from one of the Palgraves I think,' said Cornelia, glancing at the envelope; Bertha took it, colouring deeply.

'Yes, from Adelaide,' she said in a low voice.

Cornelia did not reply, but locked the bag again, and left the room, while Bertha nervously opened her letter; she gave an astonished exclamation when on unfolding it, it proved not to be from Adelaide at all, but from George. She trembled violently—ought she to read it? The

temptation was too strong for her however, she moved further from her cousin, and with her heart throbbing wildly read the few hurried lines. George was coming to Rilchester, but no one must know of it, he begged to see her once for a few moments, and proposed that they should meet in the garden that evening as soon as it was dusk. It was a short, straightforward letter, without the least approach to sentiment, and Bertha could not realise that the interview spoken of in such a business-like way was a clandestine meeting, or if the thought did occur to her she stifled it at once. George was in Rilchester at that very minute, and that evening she might—she must, see him. It was all decided in a moment, she dared not stop to think, she disregarded all the arguments against such a step, while a train of arguments in favour of it passed rapidly through her brain; she was of age, she had a right to rule her own actions, George was her cousin, why should she not speak to him for a few moments? If it was in a secret way, that was only because he had been forbidden to come to the house, it was her father's fault not hers. The idea having been once admitted, she began to feel that life would be intolerable without just this one meeting, and remembered with terror her startled exclamation on opening the letter. Had Espérance noticed it? She glanced across the room and felt relieved, for Espérance was smiling over her own letter in happy unconsciousness, looking so bright and innocent that Bertha felt a sharp sting of remorse, as she contrasted that happiness with her own excited, half terrified pleasure. While she was still musing Espérance looked up.

'Such a long letter, Bertha, and do you know, Gaspard's salary is to be raised!'

Bertha murmured something like a congratulation, and left the room abruptly, avoiding Espérance for the rest of

the afternoon, for fear she should allude to that exclamation which she might have heard.

Never had the hours seemed so long as on that day. Bertha was miserably restless and frightened, but she did not waver. Soon after nine in the evening she excused herself on the plea of having some copying to do, and stole away to the dining-room, wishing she had not been so conscious that she was doing wrong. She lighted a candle, shut the door, and for a few minutes made some pretence of writing; then she softly drew aside the shutters, opened the French window, and looked out into the dusky garden. The night was fine, but cold. She shivered a little as the fresh breeze played upon her burning cheeks; the Cathedral clock chimed a quarter-past nine, and she started with sudden fright, then recovering herself, trembled to think that she was guiltily afraid of being discovered. For a moment she hesitated, her hand was raised to close the window. Should she not, even now, give up this stolen pleasure? But while she paused, a dark figure stole silently across the lawn; it was too late! The next moment her hand was clasped in her cousin's, and the power of willing anything seemed to have passed from her.

In the drawing-room the Dean had fallen asleep over his paper. Cornelia read a volume of the *Bridgewater Treatises*, and Mrs. Mortlake talked snappishly to Espérance. It was very dull; Espérance caught herself yawning repeatedly, and she was not sorry when her cousin was roused to an expression of annoyance.

'Really, if you're so sleepy, you had better go to bed, perhaps it would wake you up to go to the dining-room and fetch me my book of knitting receipts.'

Espérance gladly hailed the opportunity of escaping from the hot drawing-room, and walked leisurely across

the hall, indulging in fantastic arm exercises on the way to relieve herself; then she opened the dining-room door, and a little cry of astonishment escaped her, as she saw Bertha in her white dress standing by the open window. Bertha herself started violently, and hastily moved back into the room.

'Oh, you are doing the copying,' said Espérance, recollecting; but Bertha in her fright, fancied that she spoke satirically. She resolved to brave it out, however.

'Yes, I am very busy; do you want anything?'

'Only Christabel's knitting book,' said Espérance, and she made haste to find the book and leave the room, seeing that Bertha did not wish to be interrupted.

As soon as the door had closed, Bertha turned again to the window.

'I am sure she suspected something,' she whispered. 'Oh, George, we must not risk it; Espérance is so sharp, and she will put them on the right clue directly!'

'If there is any chance of that, you must find some means of getting her out of the way. Could you not get grannie to invite her?'

George spoke in low, authoritative tones; Bertha's brief, terrified whispers were evidently in subjection. She had always bowed implicitly to his judgment.

'Stay, I have an idea,' he said, after a silence, and then ensued a long, whispered dialogue, Bertha agreeing in half hesitating tones to all the propositions. The chimes struck again, they counted the notes breathlessly. It was a quarter to ten; George hurriedly took leave, and Bertha closed the window, tremblingly put away her writing materials, and returned to the drawing-room. But her heart suddenly failed her when she saw the others sitting so naturally at their work, and she felt a deep pang of remorse as she glanced at her father sleeping peacefully

in his arm-chair, quite unconscious of what was in store for him. Should she write to George and say that she could not keep her promise—that while her father lived she must stay with him? But just then Mrs. Mortlake looked up with her disagreeable smile.

'Well, you've had a nice sociable evening, just after your own heart.'

Bertha shrugged her shoulders—she had caught the trick from Espérance—and remembered that after all, home was by no means the peaceful haven it looked, and besides, would they really miss her? For a week or two, perhaps, but not more.

'I am going to bed,' she said, in her usual voice, to Mrs Mortlake, 'I have a bad headache.'

Espérance looked up compassionately.

'I am so sorry, I wish I had helped you with that writing.'

No one else spoke, and Bertha, colouring deeply, left the room. How she longed that evening to be alone! Much as she loved Espérance, she felt that her presence now would be almost unbearable. She hurriedly made her preparations for the night, and lay down in the darkness, thankful for a few moments of quiet, in which she might think over the extraordinary and most unexpected events of the day. In the morning she had had no thought of disobeying her father's wishes, and before the evening was over she had weakly yielded to George's long premeditated plan; this was to be her last night beneath her father's roof! She sobbed a little as she thought of this, partly from an odd sort of attachment to the actual house, hardly to be called love, but a great deal more from terror and the sense that she was about to do what all the world would blame.

While she was still crying, Espérance came up to

bed, shading the candle with her hand, and moving about the room with noiseless steps, for fear she should disturb her cousin. Bertha watched her in silence for some minutes, but she could hardly bear to look at the pure, child-like face, it made her feel so guilty; at length a great sob escaped her, and Espérance hastened to comfort her.

'Is your head so bad, *chérie?* Let me stroke it for you.'

Bertha allowed herself to be caressed for a minute, then with an irrepressible burst of tears, she sobbed out—'Oh, Espérance, if the others had been like you, it would have been very different.'

'What would have been different?' asked Espérance, unable to understand her words.

'Everything—life!' sobbed Bertha, frightened to think how nearly she had betrayed herself.

But Espérance never dreamt of suspecting her, she thought her merely unhappy and over-tired, and said she would sing her to sleep, and Bertha lay still, listening to an old French hymn, and let her eyelids fall towards the end, but in reality she never slept at all that night. She only kept up the semblance of sleep until the candle was out; she heard the soft '*baiser du soir*' as Espérance kissed her father's miniature, the slight rustle of foreign paper, as Gaspard's letter found its place beneath her pillow, and a few minutes later, the calm, regular breathing, which told that her little cousin was asleep. Then she gave the rein to her misery, and tossed through the long, wakeful night in an agony of suspense, terror, and regret.

The next day, however, she was quite self-possessed; it was one of those suddenly hot spring days when everyone feels languid. She easily persuaded Espérance to stay indoors, and they read together a great part of the after-

noon. At dinner-time a note arrived for Bertha; her colour came and went but no one observed her. She opened it, and said it was from Mrs. Passmore.

'No one has been to see grannie for the last week,' observed Cornelia. 'What does she want, Bertha?'

'She wants me to go down with Espérance, to spend the evening with her, she says she is feeling very lonely and depressed, if we could stay the night so much the better; she has heard that the carriage is being painted, and we might not care to walk both ways. What do you think, Espérance?'

'I should like to go very much,' said Espérance, brightly, 'we have not been out all day, and it would be so nice and cool now.'

'We will go down after dinner then,' said Bertha, quietly, 'I don't know about staying for the night though, we will see how grannie is when we get there. If we do not come back by half-past ten, Christabel, you will understand that grannie was very pressing, and that we stayed.'

Bertha's cheeks were burning now, but no one noticed her. Everybody was hot that evening—there was nothing unnatural in it.

The curfew had just ceased ringing when the two cousins started. Bertha took her cloak and a small bag, just in case they stayed for the night, she said. They passed silently through the Vicar's Court, then Bertha paused.

'I am just going into the Cathedral for a moment,' she said, 'I left my umbrella in the aisle at afternoon service, somebody may carry it off if it is left.'

'But the great doors will be locked,' said Espérance.

'Yes, but I have both the keys. We will come in here, and go out by the west door, it will cut off a corner.'

She quietly opened the massive door, and locked it behind them. The light within was already growing dim owing to the stained-glass windows; they looked about for the umbrella, walking slowly down the aisle to the closed gate which led into the nave, but it was not to be found. Bertha unlocked the gate.

'I am afraid we must give it up,' she said, in a strained, unnatural voice, 'the only place we did not look in was the vestry, it is just possible that one of the vergers may have put it there, just run and see, will you!'

Espérance obeyed, walking half way up the aisle, and trying the vestry door, but it was fast locked, then she turned back to rejoin her cousin, quickening her steps as she saw that she had gone into the nave. The iron gate was closed; she supposed Bertha had left it on the latch—but no, it was securely fastened, and pull or push as she would, the gate would not yield. Was Bertha playing her a trick, she wondered. She called after her, feeling half amused, half frightened, her voice echoed long through the vaulted roof but there was no reply, only she could see that Bertha walked more quickly, and the next moment the great west door closed behind her, the key grated in the lock, and Espérance was left alone in the Cathedral.

For an instant she stood half petrified with astonishment, then glancing round she saw that Bertha had thrown down her cloak within the choir aisle, and beside it a little three-cornered note; she opened this eagerly, and read the few lines, which had evidently been written with a trembling hand:—

'Forgive me, dear Espérance, I would not have left you in this way, but I feared you suspected me last night, and we could not bear really to implicate grannie, the blame of this will fall on no one but ourselves. We shall travel

all night; to-morrow, by the time you are released, I think we shall be married. Once more forgive me, and love me still, if you can.—BERTHA.'

The note fell from Espérance's hands, and a great cry of despair rang through the Cathedral. Bertha had eloped with George, and she, the only person who knew of it, was perfectly helpless! The horror of that moment, the dismay of that discovery, altogether unnerved her. She turned giddy, and sank down on the cold stones, her hands pressed against her temples, as if to stay the fearful thoughts which flashed through her brain. The Cathedral was locked up for the night, the vergers had been their rounds, no one would go up to the belfry even, for the curfew had been rung. At the Deanery no one would dream that anything was amiss, they thought them safely at Mrs. Passmore's; they were at this very moment going on with their usual routine, the Dean perhaps in his observatory, Cornelia and Christabel quietly reading and working, all within five minutes' walk of her, and yet it was as impossible to let them know those terrible tidings, as if they had been at the North Pole. And when the Dean did know, would it not almost break his heart! It must, it must be prevented! Again she read through the note of explanation, and dwelt once more on the words, 'we shall travel all night.' They would probably start by the 8.30 express, and already it must be nearly time for it—even as she thought of it the chimes struck the half-hour, and the distant shriek of a railway whistle made itself heard. Again that wail of anguish broke from Espérance, and reverberated through the vast emptiness of the Cathedral; she sprang to her feet, and a sort of madness seemed to seize her, she pulled and shook the iron gate as if she would have torn it from its hinges, then remembering that this would only lead to the nave, and more locked

doors, she rushed to the eastern end of the aisle and knocked and hammered with all her might at the south door. But the door was far from a thoroughfare, and no one was likely to hear her. Once she caught the sound of footsteps passing on the pathway a few hundred yards from her, and knew that it must be the policeman on his rounds, and she called and knocked with the strength of despair, but the echoes only mocked her voice, the ponderous door seemed to let no sound penetrate it, and the footsteps died away in the distance, it was of no use.

Her hands were all bruised and bleeding with the unavailing attempt, she sat down on the step, and leant her head against the hard, iron-studded door, crying piteously. It was long past nine now, and she could scarcely see, the white pillars began to look grim and ghostly in the gathering gloom. With a little shiver she roused herself and began to pace up and down the aisle, though more quietly. The doors of the vestry, the side chapels, and the choir were all locked, she tried them over and over again, with a sort of craving to get into some smaller place, where the loneliness would not feel so awful; for now that she had found it clearly impossible to hinder Bertha's flight, the thought of her own position began to find place in her mind. To stay alone in the Cathedral all night long seemed to her a terrible prospect. She sat huddled up in a corner, glad to keep her eyes shut, and full of a nameless, undefined terror. The clock struck ten, and she looked up; from the east end there was a faint gleam of light, coming, perhaps, from the gas-lamps without; she groped her way nearer to it, and chose for her resting-place the tomb of one of the great benefactors of the Cathedral, Baron de Gers, because he must originally have been a Frenchman. And here she tried to go to sleep, but for a long time without success, for

the pain and excitement of the evening had been too much for her. Then, too, the eerie feeling of the place was the reverse of soothing. Espérance, though not foolish, had been brought up among the superstitions of the French peasants, and, moreover, she was very imaginative; she could not help picturing to herself the ghosts of those buried within the Cathedral coming to look at this unusual night visitant, and, of course, she began to shiver a little. Just then, upon the awful stillness of the great building, there rose a strange, weird, mysterious sound, a kind of onward rushing; her teeth chattered, she trembled from head to foot, and strained her terrified eyes into the darkness, fearing she knew not what. The sound seemed now close to her, then far away, then again it drew near and nearer, and she distinctly felt her hand touched; she gave a little cry, and, as if in answer, the rushing sound passed by her once more, and she heard a sharp, clicking squeak, and knew that her ghost was, after all, only a bat. The relief was so intense that she fairly laughed aloud at her mistake, hoping that it was not sacrilegious, and then in a few minutes she said her prayers and slept.

But her frights were not quite over. She woke with a start just as the great clock was tolling twelve, to wonder why her bed was so hard and cold, and then to realise everything more fully than ever. Twelve o'clock, and George and Bertha were far away, and everyone at the Deanery must be sleeping peacefully, and she was alone in the Cathedral! Then, with the cold chill of terror creeping over her once more, she looked up. What was that still, white figure opposite her? It had not been there when she fell asleep. She forced herself to get up, and with stiff, benumbed limbs crossed the aisle to the object of her alarm. But it proved to be no phantom—only the recumbent figure of a crusader, the white stone being

illumined by a flood of silvery moonlight which shone through the south-east windows.

She was relieved, and, in spite of her grief about Bertha and the difficulties of her situation, she could not repress an enraptured exclamation as she looked to the east end of the Cathedral. Each arch and pillar rose in marble whiteness, contrasting vividly with the black shadows around; the moonbeams fell with almost dazzling radiance on the exquisite carving, while some of the windows reflected back the brightness, each tiny pane of glass sparkling like a diamond. Although the previous day had been hot, Espérance was shivering with cold now. She crept up to one of the stoves, knowing that for a great part of the year they were kept up all night; but the fires had been discontinued for some days, and the iron bars felt as cold as ice. Then she remembered Bertha's cloak, which must, evidently, have been left for her, and she went down to the iron gate once more, her footsteps echoing strangely in the silent night. The moonlight did not fall upon the nave at all, and the yawning blackness looked awful. She turned to look once more at the radiance of the east, and then again looked through the gate, while that appalling darkness seemed to surge in upon her overwhelmingly. She picked up the cloak and moved back again to the crusader's tomb, not sorry to be in the moonlight region again.

Just then a fresh thought occurred to her mind. The vergers would come round at eight o'clock to unlock the gates! how should she explain her presence to them? Bertha's flight must, if possible, be kept secret, and yet if she were found locked into the Cathedral in this unaccountable way, they would surely suspect something. She hoped and prayed that the Dean, or Cornelia, or someone who must eventually know, might come before them, and in the

conviction that all would in some way be made right, she fell asleep.

Claude Magnay wrote for rooms at the 'SpreadEagle,' and made eager preparations for his visit to Rilchester, invoking blessings on Lady Worthington's head. He went by an evening train, and by an odd coincidence met two of his Rilchester friends at the ticket-office—the Precentor and Mr. White, the minor canon. They travelled down together, Claude in very high spirits, finding the most trifling piece of Rilchester gossip full of interest. The Precentor was a middle-aged man, very musical, and a most devoted worshipper of Wagner. He related piteous anecdotes of his revolutionary attempts on the Cathedral music, and the cruel persecutions he underwent at the hands of the Dean and the organist, while Mr. White gave a graphic description of a scene in the vestry after a wedding, when the Precentor had succeeded in having the 'Bridal March' from *Lohengrin* as a voluntary, and the Dean, not knowing what it was, had particularly admired it. Somehow, Claude rather enjoyed hearing of weddings in the Cathedral. He made many inquiries about this one, and listened contentedly to a minute and particular account of the state of the choir—how Jones had just cracked, and was apprenticed to a bookseller, and young Smith was developing capitally, and had turned out a first-rate soloist, while Brown, the tenor, had meanly deserted them and gone off to some better-paid appointment.

The Precentor liked Claude—everyone did, in fact, and, moreover, next to music, he enjoyed nothing more than talking, so he invited him to supper at his house, and kept up a brisk current of talk till the clock struck twelve; then Claude started up, saying that he wished

to be early in the Cathedral so as to get the morning light.

'It is too late, I suppose, to knock up one of the vergers?' he asked. 'I wanted to get the keys; the Dean used to lend me his, but I can hardly go round there now.'

The Precentor at once produced his keys, and followed his guest to the door.

'A beautiful moonlight night,' he said, looking out. 'I would give something to take you to the Cathedral now, but it's against rules to go in at night, and except with regard to Wagner, you know, I am very obedient.'

Claude laughed, and said he would be content with six o'clock, then walked back to his hotel for a few hours' sleep and a dream of Espérance.

The morning was as bright and sunny as he could wish. He walked round by the Deanery, and looked up wistfully at the windows; then remembering his work, he hastened on to the Cathedral, walked up the long, flagged path, and unlocked the south door. Putting down his easel and bag, he gave himself up for a moment to silent enjoyment of the beauty around; he glanced down the long vista of arches, then his eye travelled back slowly till it was arrested at the crusader's tomb. His heart beat wildly, and he hurried forward with eager, though noiseless steps. Could it indeed be Espérance. He gazed long and wonderingly at the little figure. She was nestled up into a corner, her head had fallen forward and rested against the tomb, the soft waves of dark hair contrasting with the white stone; her long, black lashes lay calmly, her cheeks were flushed with sleep, one little brown hand clasped Javotte's cross tightly, and her whole attitude and expression were of undisturbed peace. Some slight sound roused her at last; she looked up expectantly, and a glad light came into her eyes as she saw Claude.

'Ah, I am so glad!' she said, 'I knew someone would be sent, I am so glad it was you, Claude.'

The name slipped from her inadvertently; he coloured with pleasure.

'Have you been locked in by accident?' he asked, wonderingly.

Then the sorrowful look returned to Espérance's face; she told him all, and asked his advice. He was much startled and shocked, but he would dwell on Bertha's injustice to her, and the cruelty of shutting her thus into the Cathedral.

'That does not matter, it is all over now,' she interrupted, 'but how am I to tell them at home? What will they say?'

He at once turned his thoughts to her present difficulties, and self-denyingly advised her to go to the Deanery as soon as possible and tell Cornelia, leaving her to break it to the Dean. While they were still talking it over the clock struck seven, and Espérance moved towards the door, feeling dreadfully stiff after her hard couch.

'I must go,' she said, firmly, though she was beginning to tremble at the thought of this hard task. 'The house will be open now, and we must not lose time. You are staying in Rilchester, then?'

Claude assented.

'It is very wonderful that you should have happened to choose this day, but things always are arranged just rightly, are they not?'

Claude thought so too, as he watched the little figure till it passed out of sight. And then involuntarily an idea struck him—how would this unlooked-for turn of affairs affect his hopes? Would the Deanery people leave Rilchester at once, and bear Espérance with them?

CHAPTER XXXI.

'Henceforward squall nor storm
Could keep me from that Eden where she dwelt,
. . . . . .
Love trebled life within me, and with each
The year increased.' TENNYSON.

CORNELIA was like one stunned; she heard Espérance's words, felt her caresses, and struggled hard to grasp the meaning of this terrible piece of news, reading over and over again poor Bertha's farewell note. At last she burst into tears, her head was bowed on Espérance's shoulder, and the strong, independent, hardened nature was thankful enough to feel itself enfolded by loving, clinging arms. If she had been different, if the home had been a happier one, this would never have happened—there was the sting!

She roused herself at last, and went to tell the Dean and Christabel, while Espérance hovered about restlessly, fearing to meet anyone, and yet finding solitude almost unendurable.

The Dean did not appear at breakfast time; Cornelia sent Espérance with a cup of tea to his study, and she knocked, and entered tremblingly. Her uncle's face was so changed even in this short time, that she could hardly bear to look at it, his hand shook as he took the cup from her, he looked white and scared, yet there was a curious, dreamy haze in his eyes. She bent down to kiss him, but did not say anything; just as she was turning away, however, she fancied he spoke to her, and waiting, caught the muttered words, 'Retribution! Retribution! the child is like her father, too!'

Espérance pondered long over that low ejaculation; did her uncle take this trial as a punishment for his harshness to her father and mother? Perhaps Cornelia had this in her thoughts too; it certainly did pass through her mind that some strange fatality must be attached to marriages in their family. Christabel, after a brief and not very happy union, had returned to her father's house as a widow, her own prospects of happiness had been disappointed, and Bertha had married rashly and disobediently.

It was too late now to think of prevention, all that could be done was to hush up the affair as much as possible, and Bertha was so often away from home, and had so few friends in Rilchester, that for the present concealment would not be difficult.

Perhaps it was well for them all that their thoughts were necessarily diverted by the Dean's illness; it seemed advisable that they should all go away as soon as possible, and this making a convenient pretext it was arranged that Cornelia should go with her father to Germany, where he was to take a course of baths, while Mrs. Mortlake went to visit some of her husband's relatives, taking Bella with her.

Espérance was sent to the Priory. It was a great relief to her to be there once more; the strain of the last few days had been great, and the quiet of old Mrs. Passmore's house seemed doubly restful. She had only been there a few hours, however, when from her retreat in the garden she heard the front-door bell, and fearing some visitor from Rilchester who might ask tiresome questions, was a little vexed. The servant came across the lawn to her.

'Mistress would be glad if she would step into the drawing-room.'

She obeyed not very willingly, and the surprise was all the greater when, on going in, she found the visitor to be Claude Magnay.

Mrs. Passmore was in the middle of the stock remark which old ladies seem to enjoy making to young men—'Remember him? of course she did, why she had nursed him in long clothes!'

Espérance stood for a moment holding her brown straw hat in her hand, her face was glowing, and her heart beat quickly. Mrs. Mortlake had told her not to go in to Rilchester more than she could help in order to avoid questions; she had not been to the Cathedral that day, and somehow she had so missed the bright morning greeting and the few words which had always passed between her and Claude when she went in to service.

Claude came forward eagerly to meet her, and she soon forgot her momentary embarrassment, and began to talk as naturally as ever. Mrs. Passmore was certainly the most charming old lady. Claude blessed her inwardly when she sent them out into the garden, her cheery 'Now, children! go and see the roses,' was really delightful. He did not mind being considered a 'child,' when Espérance made the plural. They walked about the old garden half the afternoon, they gathered flowers for grannie, and were told not to forget themselves, so Claude took the *rôle* of M. Wörth again, and gathered a deep crimson rose for Espérance, and Espérance after some consideration, chose a crimson carnation for his button-hole. They wandered about, and paced up and down the trim box-edged paths, while the time slipped by unnoticed, and at length grannie had to call them in to tea in the little, old-fashioned parlour. Espérance sat at the head of the table, and poured out tea for them. She looked more bewitching than ever as her hands moved deftly about among the old

blue-and-white china, and there was a delightful copper tea-kettle on the hearth which Claude had the pleasure of fetching backwards and forwards for her, a task which he liked so much that he would quite have spoiled the tea by his frequent attentions if she had allowed him.

Then he reminded her of her promised sitting, and she referred prettily to Mrs. Passmore, whereupon Claude took the speaking-trumpet, and succeeded in making grannie understand that he wanted to paint Espérance. This seemed quite to gratify the old lady, and before he left it was arranged that he should come every afternoon to carry on his work.

Of course while he painted he talked, and Espérance, who was never quiet for long at a time, talked too, and blushed, and showed the most puzzling varieties of expression, sometimes even forgot herself so far as to gesticulate, so that had she been an ordinary model, Claude would have been enraged; as it was, however, he was all the more delighted, and in spite of her delinquencies, the picture was a great success. He found it very hard now not to tell her of his love, but he remembered Lady Worthington's advice, and with a sigh resolved to respect French customs. He asked her instead for Gaspard's address in Dickoya, hoping she might perhaps guess why he wanted it, but she only looked provokingly innocent, and began to talk of coffee plantations.

One day, however, when he walked out to the Priory, he found Espérance unmistakably grave and sad, he even fancied she had been crying. In the course of the afternoon it transpired that Mrs. Mortlake had sent for her; Bella was poorly, and they were going at once to the seaside.

'I do not want to leave grannie,' she explained, regretfully; 'it is so quiet and happy here at the Priory.

Besides, to-morrow is my *jour de naissance*, and we were to have had a *fête*.'

But the tears were not altogether for the lost *fête*, and, after all, the eighteenth birthday proved a day of strange, dawning joy. Claude came to say good-bye to her just before she started, bringing with him some exquisite flowers. He would not have ventured to do so at another time, but the *fête* day made a happy excuse, and his parting words sent a glad thrill through Espérance.

'You will not be at the seaside all the summer, I hope, for I shall be in Rilchester again in two months' time.'

Her presence would make a difference to him, then! She was glad to have the railway carriage to herself that day, for she could not help bursting out into little ecstatic snatches of song.

* * * * * * *

Gaspard had had a rough, cross-country ride on his mare Blanchette. It was Sunday morning, and he had been to a store twelve miles off to service, now he was coming back to Mr. Seymour's bungalow very hot and tired and hungry.

Mr. Seymour was standing at the door as he dismounted. He himself did not manage to get to a Sunday service more than once or twice in the year.

'You have had a hot ride, Gaspard'—the name of De Mabillon was too long to please him. 'I hope your parson gave you something very superfine in the way of sermons to make up for it.'

'Two in one,' said Gaspard, with a yawn, 'lasting just an hour, and out of a congregation of thirty, twenty-two were nodding before the end.'

Mr. Seymour made a gesture of compassion, then held out two letters.

'The post has come, there is a reward for you.'

Gaspard took the letters, scrutinising them eagerly while he led Blanchette round to her stable, then, having handed her over to one of the coolies, he entered the bungalow, threw himself back in a wicker chair and opened Espérance's letter. He was much startled by her news of Bertha's marriage, and shocked to think of her night of loneliness and terror in the Cathedral; but the end of her letter reassured him. He liked to think of her with kind old Mrs. Passmore, and with Claude Magnay to enliven her every afternoon; there was a brightness of tone, too, about her writing which made him feel happy about her. However much she tried to make her letters uniformly cheerful, he always managed to find out in what mood they had been written, and about this letter there was an unusually buoyant happiness.

He opened the next one more leisurely, wondering who it was from, then seeing the signature, was glad and yet surprised that Claude should write to him. His bronzed face wore a startled expression as he slowly deciphered the large, irregular characters. He read on, however:—

'My dear De Mabillon,—When we parted I did not know how very soon I should have to come upon you for that promised favour, which you were so pleased to have suggested to you last summer. I am taking you at your word, however, and am going to make a very serious and great request. But first for a little explanation. I was staying at Worthington Hall last Christmas, and saw your sister twice. I realised then for the first time how much I loved her, and since then time has only strengthened these convictions. I write now to ask if you will consent to my proposing to your sister? I shall not dwell upon my love for her—I cannot write of it, and I believe you will understand me. I think I could make her happy, and

most earnestly beg that you will allow me to speak to her. With regard to money considerations, you already know that I am not rich, but I am in the receipt of a small yearly income from invested capital, and am making a good deal by my pictures, so that I think we could live very comfortably, and I would insure my life or do anything you like. I shall await your reply very anxiously. My request is a very great one, but I know you too well not to feel certain that you will grant it, if there is no real obstacle in the way.

'Yours most truly,

'CLAUDE MAGNAY.

'*Rilchester, 5th June,* 1873.'

Gaspard's face was a strange mixture of thankfulness, joy, and regret, when he put down the letter. He liked Claude exceedingly, and felt that he could give Espérance to him more willingly than to most men, but in any case her marriage would involve a certain sense of loss to himself. There could be no happy visions of a home in Ceylon now. But Gaspard had unlearnt his selfishness in a hard school, and he loved Espérance far too much not to rejoice in this prospect of happiness for her. Before the Sunday was over he had written a brotherly letter to Claude, enclosing another to be given to Espérance when he had spoken to her; and somehow the more he thought over this new suggestion the more he liked it, nor had he much doubt what Espérance's answer would be.

CHAPTER XXXII.

'It is not because your heart is mine, mine only, mine alone;
It is not because you chose me, weak and lonely for your own;
Not because the earth is fairer, and the skies spread above you
Are more radiant for the shining of your eyes—that I love you!

But because this human love, though true and sweet—Yours and mine,
Has been sent by Love more tender, more complete, more divine;
That it leads our hearts to rest at last in Heaven, far above you;
Do I take you as a gift that God has given—and I love you.'

A. A. Procter.

By the end of July the family at the Deanery were all at home again, the Dean seemed much better for his stay in Germany, and Mrs. Mortlake had recovered her spirits, too, it was only Cornelia who was permanently altered by that time of grief, and shame, and self-reproach. She never lost the lines of sadness which gathered then around her firm, compressed lips, but the expression rather softened her face than otherwise.

Bertha's marriage had now of course been published. It was generally known in Rilchester that she had been married abroad to her cousin, but that her family did not approve of the connection, so the subject was avoided with the Collinsons, and with the exception of Claude Magnay none but the very nearest relatives ever heard the real story.

Claude waited impatiently through those summer months for Gaspard's reply to his letter, working hard at his painting, and alternating between hope and despair. At length one morning he found the long-expected letter on his breakfast table; it was all that he could possibly wish, Gaspard was apparently pleased and gratified by his

proposal, and wrote most affectionately. Claude's happiness was complete, his long waiting had been rewarded, he would lose no more time. He rang the bell at once and ordered the 'angel-page' to call a hansom, then unable to touch his breakfast, he rushed up to his room, tossed a few clothes into a portmanteau, and in ten minutes was on his way to the station to catch an early train to the north.

The journey rather quieted him down. By the time the flat, barren plain warned him that he was near Rilchester, he had become far less hopeful and confident, and when the magnificent pile of the Cathedral appeared in the distance, a dark mass against the blue sky, he even began to feel doubtful as to the wisdom of going to the Deanery at all. Should he write to her instead? He sent his portmanteau to the 'Spread Eagle,' and walked slowly away from the station. Rilchester looked as peaceful as ever, and even more deserted, for it was a very hot afternoon and few people were stirring: you might have fired a cannon down the High Street without hurting a soul. Claude walked on trying to make up his mind, till at last he found himself close to the Vicar's Court, then with the sudden perception of his nearness to Espérance, his hesitation disappeared, he walked quickly through the silent court, and across the square, gravelled approach to the Deanery, and rang the funereal-sounding bell. He asked boldly for Mdlle. de Mabillon. She was at home; he entered the blue-and-white tiled hall where he had seen her last Christmas with her holly wreath, and felt his courage rising. The footman, who of course remembered him well, turned just as they were crossing the hall—there were visitors in the drawing-room, he believed Ma'mselle was in the dining-room, would Mr. Magnay see her there? Claude eagerly assented, blessing the

thoughtful footman, and registering a mental vow that he would ever after tip him in gold, then the heavy door was thrown back, he caught a momentary vision of mahogany and crimson rep, and the next moment was only conscious that he was in the same room with Espérance, that he held her hand in his. They sat down near the open window, he heard her speaking to him in her clear voice, and was vaguely aware that she looked cool and beautiful in her white dress, among the hot, ugly surroundings, and that she wore a deep crimson rose, like the one he had given her at the Priory. She was telling him of their stay at the seaside, then she asked if he had come to paint another picture in the Cathedral, and Claude suddenly roused himself from his half-dreamy happiness, and replied earnestly.

'No, I have not come to paint this time. You remember, perhaps, that I asked you for your brother's address, when I was staying here before. Can you guess at all why I wrote to him?'

He had spoken hesitatingly, his colour had risen, and he began to wish most heartily that he had written to her. How was she to guess from his floundering speech that he loved her? Why had he begun with such an unanswerable question? Espérance looked up at him with her gravely-sweet eyes, her heart was beating fast, but she saw his embarrassment, and said gently, 'Tell me.'

Those two words, and the sweet, truthful, upward glance, gave him fresh strength; he stood up and drew nearer to her, leaning against the window frame.

'I wrote to your brother,' he began, in a low voice, 'because I had a favour to ask him. I wrote to ask him if I might come to see you, and this morning I heard from him—he said I might.'

There was a pause, Espérance's eyes were cast down

now, her cheeks were glowing; a little tabby kitten stole in through the French window and played about at her feet, but she did not notice it.

'Do you remember,' Claude began again. 'Do you remember that snowy Christmas Eve, when you were in the hall decorating? You thought I did not recognise you then, but it was at that moment, really, that I first saw ——'

He broke off abruptly. Why did that wretched little kitten distract her attention just then by springing on to her knee? She took it in her arms, rose from her chair and came to the window. Claude stroked the little intruder in silence, then Espérance looked up, and somehow their eyes met; he knew that she understood him then, and spoke with sudden confidence.

'Espérance! I have no words with me, but I love you with my whole heart and soul! tell me, darling, could you love me a little, too, some day?'

He had taken her hands in his, and could feel them trembling; her colour came and went, but she did not keep him long in suspense; he knew his answer by the rapturous light that dawned in her eyes, and it was with his arms round her that she sobbed out, 'Oh, Claude, now—always—with all the love I have!'

Either the kitten was endowed in the highest degree with tact, or else she saw a bird in the garden, for when Claude began to speak she suddenly scrambled down and ran away. The lovers were left undisturbed for at least an hour, then the Cathedral bells began to ring for afternoon service, and Claude rose to go, promising to call and see the Dean afterwards. Espérance went up to her room, feeling as if it were all a wonderful dream, and glad to have something tangible in the shape of Gaspard's delightful letter of congratulation to assure her that this

great, awe-inspiring joy was real and lasting. She was glad to be alone for a few minutes; then, hearing Cornelia pass along the gallery, she opened her door and called timidly.

Cornelia came with inquiry in her eyes, but one glance at Espérance told her all.

'So Claude Magnay has been here,' she said, quietly.

'Yes, he has been here a long time,' said Espérance, looking down. 'And—and, I have something to tell you, dear—he has asked me to be his wife.'

She half hid her face on her cousin's shoulder as she said this; then, reassured by Cornelia's embrace, she went on more eagerly.

'And he loves me, Cornelia; he has loved me, he says, ever since Christmas. It seems so strange, so wonderful! He says I shall sit with him in his studio while he paints, and we shall have a dear little cozy house—think of having a house of one's very own! And you must come and stay with us, Cornelia, and then you will be able to hear all the great people preach, and go to all the lectures. Dear Cornelia, he is so good! so wonderful! It seems almost too much joy!'

Cornelia kissed her repeatedly, but could not speak; then suddenly she turned away, hurriedly took off her spectacles and wiped them. 'Will you like to come to the service or not?' she asked, in an odd, choked voice.

Espérance said she would go, and the cousins went downstairs hand in hand.

Claude sat in the stalls just behind the Deanery pew, and somehow the service that afternoon seemed on purpose for them. Nothing could have suited them so well as those thirtieth-day psalms, with their praise and thanksgiving, nor could the Precentor have chosen a more fitting anthem than, 'I waited for the Lord.' Cornelia could not

help glancing at Espérance's sweet, tranquil face, as the full chorus took up the words, 'Oh, blessed are they that hope and trust in the Lord!' and when it was over, and she was on her knees once more, she did not restrain her tears.

Claude joined them as they went out, and Cornelia spoke a few words of congratulation to him—kind, true words, with no effusion. He looked so radiantly happy that she half trembled to think of his interview with the Dean, but it passed off better than might have been expected. The Dean had a great regard for Claude, he was flattered that he had thought of his niece, and there was nothing to be said against the marriage. He said he should like to see Espérance, and Claude went to fetch her from the drawing-room, keeping her hand still in his as they passed into the gloomy library, and leading her up to the Dean. It reminded her of that other summons more than a year ago, when she had heard that Gaspard was going to Ceylon; but how different was everything now!

The Dean sat in his great leather arm-chair. He looked grave and rather severe, but it was his usual expression now, and in agreeing to Claude's proposal he naturally thought of George Palgrave, and remembered sadly Bertha's defiance of his authority.

'Claude has just informed me, my dear, that he has asked you to be his wife, and I desired to see you for a few minutes that I might give you some words of advice and congratulation.'

This beginning sounded rather formidable. Espérance shrank nearer to Claude, while he held her hand closely. The Dean continued.

'You are about to enter on a most serious and solemn undertaking. I trust that you have gravely considered the matter at your leisure, and that you are well certified of the wisdom and fitness of your choice.

Do not be deluded into thinking that married life is nothing but bliss; if you prepare yourself to find it such, you will be speedily disappointed, but act and think wisely and soberly, and I most sincerely trust that such happiness as is to be found in this world may be yours. You are greatly honoured by receiving the affection and esteem of a clever and worthy man, and I have no doubt that you will endeavour to prove your gratitude.'

Claude was struck dumb by the pomposity of this harangue, and Espérance could not help being amused by it. It had never entered her head to think of Claude as a 'worthy man,' and there was something incongruous in the term; nor would she have dreamt of applying the words 'esteem and affection' to the beautiful, soul-satisfying love which had just been revealed to her. But that happy French magic of saying the right thing at the right time came to her aid. Before Claude had recovered from his amazement she was kneeling beside the Dean, and the icy solemnity of the interview was at once broken.

'Dear uncle,' she said, eagerly, 'I feel that we owe everything to you. If it had not been for your kindness to me I should never have seen Claude; there is only one more thing I want, and that is your blessing.'

The Dean was touched. He put his hands on the two young heads, and his words were unusually fervent, then for a few minutes they all talked naturally, and before long Claude had begged for the keys of the Cathedral, and had wandered away with Espérance for an hour's uninterrupted peace before dinner. It was while they were standing in the south aisle, beside the crusader's tomb, that he drew out a ring and placed it on Espérance's finger.

'Do you remember,' he said, smiling, 'that walk which we had once together, when you told me your motto was

"*Espérez toujours?*" I thought we would keep it still. If you had said "No" this afternoon, I should have kept the ring and the motto for my comfort.'

Espérance looked at the beautiful little ring and saw what he meant. It was from his own design: a wide band of gold with the motto in quaintly-carved letters around it. Nothing could have delighted her more.

Just as they were coming out of the Cathedral they met the Precentor; he had already heard of their engagement, and was fairly overwhelming with his kind wishes, making Espérance colour deeply by asking which was to be the 'auspicious day.'

The reference set Claude thinking; he did not speak of it again that afternoon, but before long he introduced the subject. There was no reason for a prolonged engagement, and before he left Rilchester it was arranged that the marriage should take place at the beginning of the next year.

On the whole that autumn passed happily; Mrs. Mortlake was quite in her element at such a time, and was much more kind than Espérance had expected; indeed, after she had heard that Bella was to be a bridesmaid, she was never tired of discussing the wedding day. Cornelia was, however, the real sympathiser, and it was she who first asked Espérance if there was no one she would like invited to the wedding.

The Worthingtons and Frances Neville were, of course, to be present, and Espérance remembered Madame Lemercier, and wondered if Mr. Henderson would allow Maggie to come too. These, with an uncle of Claude's, a cousin, who acted as best man, and Mr. White, the Minor Canon, made up the small wedding party, for both Claude and Espérance were singularly destitute of relations. Mrs. Mortlake was quite sorry that the procession of guests

would not be more imposing; she tried hard to find a few friends for the occasion—sent a pressing invitation to Mr. Henderson to accompany his little girl, and persuaded old Mrs. Passmore to risk coming out in the winter. Then Espérance had to choose who should marry them, and, having considered the various Cathedral dignitaries for some time, she finally selected the good-natured Precentor as the most kind-hearted among them, and a friend of Claude's as well. When this was arranged Mrs. Mortlake suggested that the Precentor's eldest little girl would look charming as a bridesmaid, and was exactly Bella's height, whereas Kathie was shorter, and would, no doubt, pair much better with Maggie Henderson. Espérance, of course, agreed to this, and was a good deal relieved that Christabel should take such interest in the preparations, being quite well aware that if this had not been the case the autumn would have been a time of great discomfort.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Love shall be purified by Pain,
And Pain be soothed by Love again
So let us now take heart and go
Cheerfully on through joy and woe;
No change the summer sun can bring,
Or the inconstant skies of spring,
Or the bleak winter's stormy weather,
For we shall meet them, Love, together!'

A. A. Procter.

Lady Worthington was delighted to hear of Claude's success, and felt much satisfaction in remembering the share she had had in bringing the two together. She and Frances saw a great deal of Espérance, and were very anxious that she should spend Christmas at the Hall; but

she was obliged to decline the invitation, as she felt sure that Cornelia at least would be grieved to lose her at all before the wedding day. This had been fixed for the 6th January, and the time was drawing very near. Claude came down for a few days at Christmas, but he was obliged to go back to town again to make his final arrangements; as they intended to be abroad for some months he had a good deal to do, and at the last was so much hindered that he did not reach Rilchester till the latest train on the evening of the fifth.

That was a strange day to Espérance, and rather a dreary one. Frances Neville came to see her in the morning, and in the afternoon she drove to the Priory to see Mrs. Passmore, hurrying back with the expectation of Claude's arrival. Instead of this, however, there was a telegram to say that he must come by the later train instead, and, although the meeting was only postponed for a few hours, she could not help feeling disappointed and depressed.

While she was sitting rather drearily with the telegram in her hand, Mrs. Mortlake came in with a disturbed face.

'Where have you been?' she asked, in a reproachful tone. 'So many callers have been here wishing to see you and the presents, you really ought to have stayed in this afternoon.'

'I am very sorry; I went to the Priory to see Mrs. Passmore.'

'Oh! that is why the carriage was out! You really are very inconsiderate, Espérance. I suppose you kept the horses standing at the door for ever so long in that pouring rain! You ought to be more thoughtful. I think it's the least you can do when you live in other people's houses.'

'I am very sorry,' repeated poor Espérance, 'but Cornelia told me to drive.'

Mrs. Mortlake muttered something about the mistake of having two mistresses, and left the room, while Espérance crouched down beside the fire and had a good cry. She was tired and disappointed, and the gloomy twilight of the dining-room made her feel still more dreary and forlorn. And to-morrow was to be her wedding day! She tried hard to realise it, and felt a little sad as she remembered how far away Gaspard was, and wondered if other people felt as lonely as she did on the eve of marriage. And then that bitter reproach which Mrs. Mortlake was so fond of using about 'other people's houses' stung her afresh, and she felt that it was hard and cruel to have made it on this last day.

Her dismal thoughts were not put to flight till Cornelia returned from the Cathedral, and coming into the room was surprised to find her alone, curled up on the hearthrug.

'Claude does not come till half-past nine,' she said, mournfully.

'Oh! I am sorry for that,' said Cornelia, kindly. Then stirring the fire into a blaze, and glancing again at Espérance, 'Why, you have been crying; how is that, dear?'

'It was lonely, and Christabel was vexed with me, and I think she will be glad when I'm gone, and somehow that felt so wretched,' replied Espérance, nestling up to Cornelia in the way which she had only lately dared to do.

'Christabel will really miss you a great deal,' said Cornelia, decidedly, 'whether she says so or not. I am sure she will, for you have done a great deal for her; and you know, Espérance, how much I shall miss you.'

Cornelia could not say more; she could not tell Espérance of the wonderful change which had been wrought in her life during the last year and a half, of the cold, hard,

self-contained nature, which had first been softened by the sight of her love for Gaspard, of the long-dormant womanly tenderness which had been awakened at the time of her illness. Reserved she must always be, but no longer with the cold suspiciousness of former times.

Espérance quite understood those few words, and answered them with such gratitude for the love which she herself had stimulated, and such lavish endearments, that Cornelia could not help feeling deeply touched. After that they talked for a good half-hour about Claude, by which time Espérance was quite herself again, and ready to take the greatest possible interest in the arrival of the Hendersons and Madame Lemercier.

The 6th January dawned gloomily enough; it was one of those still, cold winter days, when not a ray of sunlight seems able to pierce the grey, cloudy atmosphere. The Rilchester people looked suspiciously at the sky, and quoted the proverb about the bride whom the rain falls on, and even the family at the Deanery felt depressed, except indeed the little bride herself. Nothing could affect her happy serenity that day.

Frances and Madame Lemercier helped to dress her in the Indian muslin which Gaspard had sent home, relieved by its pretty trimming of airy-light swansdown, and tiny sprays of myrtle and orange blossom. It was a little too simple to please Madame Lemercier, 'Too much like a dress for a *première communion, chérie,*' she explained.

'I don't think it need be any better than that, dear Madame,' said Espérance, simply.

Madame Lemercier hardly understood the remark, but she expressed complete satisfaction when the tiny wreath and veil of *tulle* were added, and declared that the *tout ensemble* was perfect when Claude's bouquet of Christmas

roses and maiden-hair was brought upstairs—he had arranged it himself, and would not admit any other flower.

For a few minutes she was left alone, then when the last party of guests had started for the Cathedral, she went quietly downstairs to the drawing-room, expecting to find her uncle there. The room was empty, however; she waited till the carriage was announced, then feeling just a little forlorn, she crossed the hall and knocked at the library door.

The Dean was bending over a great dusty volume.

'Oh! is it time, my dear?' he said, looking up, 'I'll just finish this page, and perhaps you would see to that.'

He held up a white glove which had lost a button, and she took it obediently, and ran to look for her work box. In spite of the hindrance of trembling fingers, the glove was ready for the Dean long before he was ready for it; however, at last he did get up, carefully placed a marker in his book, adjusted his white tie, put on the gloves, and turned to his niece with a little bow.

'Now, my dear, I am at your service.'

For a moment she felt an unutterable longing for her father, but she would not allow herself to be really chilled by the Dean's frigid manner, knowing that he intended to be kind. She lifted up her face to be kissed, and then allowed herself to be led in silence to the carriage. The Dean was very absent that morning, he muttered to himself about somebody's comet which was expected, and made numerous little calculations during the drive. Espérance said nothing, but held her Christmas roses tightly, and wondered whether Gaspard were thinking of her.

Then they reached the west door of the Cathedral, and the Dean suddenly rousing himself gave her his arm, and led her into the nave. The gloom was intense, and the

darkness and awe of the building would have chilled Espérance, had it not been for Wagner's beautiful March which pealed forth from the organ as she entered. Claude joined them within the choir gate, and they passed on through the crowd of eager, curious faces, to the altar. Cornelia, from her place at the east end, watched anxiously, but she could not feel otherwise than thankful and happy when the little bride came into sight, a bright form in the surrounding gloom. It could not be called an imposing procession. Mrs. Mortlake, indeed, was vexed by its extreme simplicity, and longed for more bridesmaids and more elaborate dresses, but nevertheless there was something very striking about it. The Dean, more erect than usual, looked quite patriarchal, with his silvery hair and flowing white beard; Claude was eager-eyed and wistfully grave; while between them was Espérance, with her radiant brown eyes full of tender awe, and her sweet, tranquil face looking almost as child-like as those of her little bridesmaids.

The service proceeded, and the darkness grew more and more oppressive, while the vows were interchanged between 'Claude' and 'Espérance Bien-Aimée;' the voices of the choir sounded far away in the gloom as they chanted the psalms, and the Precentor could hardly see to read the prayers. It was not till the very end of the service, when Mendelssohn's hymn, 'Now thank we all our God,' was being sung, that the light became suddenly brighter, and as Claude led his wife from the altar, a gleam of sunshine penetrated the clerestory windows, and the dreary oppressive obscurity was at once changed to golden, mellowed brightness.

But the transformation scene that awaited them without was still more wonderful. As the great west doors were thrown open, and the pealing bells overpowered the distant

notes of the organ, a brightness more dazzling than the winter sunlight greeted them. The heavy, ominous clouds had discharged themselves, and during the service there had been a brief but heavy snow-storm; now the ground was covered with a veil of the purest white, the heavy sky had changed to clear, frosty blue, and the day seemed turned from mournful gloom to rejoicing. Mrs. Mortlake would have been greatly disturbed, had she known that the bride and bridegroom were actually obliged to wait, while the vergers swept the snow from the carpeted path, but happily they themselves did not the least mind.

'How beautiful it all looks,' said Espérance, as they drove through the silent, snowy streets, 'and I am so glad the sun has come out to welcome us.'

'Yes,' replied Claude, 'this accounts for the darkness just now, it ought to be a good omen for our life, darling—brightness and light after gloom.'

'Yes,' said Espérance, smiling quietly, 'and a reason and purpose in the gloom all the time.'

It was essentially a happy wedding; even Cornelia, though feeling the loss of Espérance keenly, could not but rejoice for her, and there were no painful leave-takings. The Dean seemed pleased, and on the whole relieved—his sister's child was marrying well, he had had some share in introducing her to Claude Magnay, and now his responsibility was over. Another comfortable reflection was that she was no longer a 'De Mabillon.' He took much pleasure in speaking of her as 'my niece, Mrs. Magnay,' and in the strength of this new consolation, endured Sir Henry Worthington's speech, with its kind-hearted and delicate allusions to M. de Mabillon and Gaspard. Espérance's stay at the Deanery had effected much, but it had not cured the Dean of his old antipathy, nor had it in the

least convinced him that he ought to have owned himself in the wrong.

Lady Worthington watched the farewells with a good deal of interest; her own motherly kiss had been given, then came Mrs. Mortlake with her properly expressed wishes for future happiness, Cornelia with her long, silent embrace, the Dean with his patriarchal blessing, and lastly poor little Bella in floods of tears, which seemed all the more surprising as she had always been Espérance's arch-tormentor. Madame Lemercier also shed tears, but the next moment she was smiling and assuring Cornelia that it was the most beautiful wedding that had ever been, and that Rilchester had made Espérance like a 'true angel.' Madame took great interest in matters matrimonial, and since their Welsh tour she had had a charming little project; not that she was a match-maker, she was scarcely in the position for it, but she watched with hope and anxiety, and gave a little nod of satisfaction when Mr. Henderson was carried off to see the fernery at Worthington. Her rapid imagination had arranged everything most satisfactorily, and before the afternoon was over she had arrived at the conclusion that Devonshire air would suit Miss Neville's health admirably, and that Maggie would have a charming *belle-mère*.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

'Thy branches are not bare, and yet,
What storms have shook them to and fro.

To thee has time brought many joys,
If many it has bid to go.

Trust in that veilèd hand which leads,
None by the path that he would go,

And from the Lord all good expect,
Who many mercies strews below.'

From the Arabic, ABP. TRENCH.

ESPÉRANCE had never travelled much before, and her freshness and *naïveté*, combined with a very real appreciation of the beautiful, made her a perfect travelling companion; while the freedom from all formality and restraint, and the constant sense of love and protection, made that year of wandering one of the happiest of her life. Of the actual idleness of a honeymoon they had none. Claude worked assiduously from the very first, but the work took him to all the most beautiful places, and was never allowed to interfere with her comfort or enjoyment. They spent the winter in Italy, wandering on from place to place as they pleased, with no fixed limit to their stay.

It was while they were spending a few days at a little village near Ravenna, that Espérance first learnt Claude's strong predilection for waifs and strays. A certain black-haired, large-eyed boy in tattered garments, had watched him for some time when he was sketching one morning; this was no novelty, as he not unfrequently had a small crowd of children to watch him, but this particular boy appeared day after day, at first looking on intently and in

silence, but afterwards venturing on intelligent questions. The third day he brought a rough attempt of his own to show, and Claude, struck by its merits, believed he had discovered a second Giotto; the boy undoubtedly had great talent, and Claude at once offered to help him. Espérance was amused and pleased at this novel addition to their party. Beppo was a sharp boy, and was useful besides in fetching and carrying, he also cleaned Claude's palette and washed his brushes, and seemed to be making real progress in his studies. But unfortunately one morning Claude found his paint-box ransacked, and all his most valuable brushes missing—Beppo had mysteriously disappeared in the night, and was never again heard of!

The next waif was rather more successful. She was a lovely little Italian girl whom Claude picked up in the streets of Florence and brought home to paint. Espérance liked her much better than the artistic Beppo, more especially when she found that she was homeless and without belongings. They kept her with them while they were in the place, and afterwards sent her to an orphanage where she was happy and well cared for, and every year sent letters of grateful remembrance to the 'dear *signora*,' as she called Espérance.

The third waif was an old half-blind and half-starved artist whom Claude found out in Rome. He was a German, with a long, ragged, grey beard; but Espérance forgot his nationality in his misfortunes, and was very kind to him. He dined with them every day, and grew perceptibly fatter towards the end of the time.

After Easter they left Rome and spent several quiet weeks in the most lovely parts of the Engadine, and Claude found Switzerland so beguiling that the weeks passed to months, and summer changed to autumn before a return to England was thought of. At last they spoke

of really settling down in October, and Espérance began to think how she should arrange her rooms at St. John's Wood. But a great surprise was being prepared for her.

One day Claude came in with an open letter in his hand, and his face brimming over with delight and triumph.

'*Chérie*,' he said, brightly, 'what do you say to spending the winter in Auvergne?'

She gave a little cry of joy. They had always talked of going home through France, but to spend the winter there had never occurred to her.

'You would really like it, then?' said Claude, with satisfaction. 'I have been thinking of it for weeks, but the tiresome proprietor of the Château was so long in writing, and I did not want you to be disappointed.'

'What! we shall really be at the dear old Château?' exclaimed Espérance, joyously.

'Yes, the present proprietor is away from home, and he has agreed to let it to me for four months. Now at last I shall be able to make good that promise I gave you so long ago—to paint your dear mountains of Auvergne.'

And so it happened that on a lovely October evening Espérance found herself once more in her old home. The return might have been painful to her in other circumstances, but with her hand in Claude's she could look with happy recognition, and tender but not regretful memories of the past, at all around her, from the beautiful Mont d'Or itself to the dear old grey Château, with its ruinous walls and clinging ivy. It was all wonderfully little altered—the tiny village in the valley; the convent where she had spent her long afternoons; the grassy terrace on which she had so often walked with her father; the half-ruined *pigeonnier*, to the top of which Gaspard used to carry her to the imminent peril of both

their necks; lastly, the great door itself, with its rough-hewn stone steps, and a little crowd of old friends with an eager welcome.

There were a great many tears and embraces in spite of Espérance's newly-acquired dignity. Mère Bonnier hung about her in an ecstasy of happiness, Marie was scarcely less demonstrative, and Pierre, poor old Javotte's son, now a married man with two little black-eyed children of his own, was eager to kiss 'Madame's' hand. Claude was amused and touched by the little un-English scene, and saw plainly enough that Espérance was not the only one who would be gratified by his scheme for passing the winter in Auvergne.

Nor was he inclined to accuse her of exaggerating the beauties of her native place—the rich pasture-land, the fertile valleys, the wild grandeur of the semi-volcanic mountains, all filled him with admiration, while the beautiful autumnal tints lent fresh glories to the thickly-wooded landscape. He worked hard for the next two months, and Espérance watched the progress of each picture, with a delight and pride greater than that which she had taken even in the most enchanting Italian view.

Those autumn days were very restful and happy; she used to take her needlework and sit beside him while he painted, wandering about when she pleased among the woods in search of late flowers, or resting when tired in a cleverly-contrived hammock which Claude used to rig up for her.

Then, when the light began to fail, and the *ranz des vaches* echoed among the mountains from the clear voices of the village girls, Claude would pack up his easel and his painting apparatus, and they would go back to the old Château through the rustling fallen leaves and the golden-

brown woods. It was not until the trees were quite bare and leafless that Claude was obliged to go out alone to his work; and the painting did not prosper half so well then, for somehow there was always a good excuse for a speedy return to the Château—either the lights were not favourable or it was too cold, or he had forgotten some very necessary implement. But perhaps this was not very blameworthy, for in one of the quaint, rough rooms of the Château, there awaited him a study of life worth all the mountains of Auvergne put together.

On Christmas eve a little son had been born to them, and though Alphonse Noel, as they called him, was heir to nothing but his father's genius, the villagers were enthusiastic in their delight, and with *M. le Curé's* leave pealed the church bells till the mountains rang with the echoes.

The baby grew and thrived, and was pronounced by everyone to be just like a De Mabillon. Claude wondered what Dean Collinson would say; but he himself was well content that Noel should have inherited his mother's radiant, ever-varying, brown eyes, her soft, dark hair, and southern complexion.

Their time at the Château was now nearly over, early in February they were to return to England, and Espérance began to dread all the farewells; however, they passed off more happily than she had feared. Claude arranged a village *fête* in one of the great disused rooms, and all Mabillon came to pay its respects to 'Madame' and her baby. Nor was she to go back to England alone; Marie Bonnier had pleaded hard to be allowed to act as *bonne* to little Noel, and Espérance, who knew well enough how faithful and devoted were French country servants, gladly accepted her. Claude was guilty of one other extravagance which perhaps pleased Espérance more than anything, he insisted on conferring a pension on Pierre,

Javotte's son, in memory of his mother's self-denying devotion. And Pierre was not too proud to receive the substantial *souvenir*, but gratefully kissed Madame's hand, purchased a cow with part of his newly-acquired riches, and began to save up for his little girl's *dot*.

The return to London was not without its pleasures. Espérance looked forward to arranging her new home, and she was anxious to see Lady Worthington and Frances again. Bertha and George, too, had left their German home, and were now living at Bayswater, and the two cousins made many plans for meeting. Dean Collinson still refused to see his daughter, and though Cornelia had written, she had not been up to town since their return, so that Bertha welcomed Espérance doubly, longing to see a home face once more.

In spite of that, however, the meeting was a very trying one, Bertha was strangely subdued and changed, and Espérance was dismayed at her pale, worn face, and hollow eyes; the old nonchalant expression had certainly quite vanished, but it was replaced by a look of sorrowful, harassed anxiety, which made Espérance's heart ache.

All she could do at present was to sympathise with her, and try to give her fresh interests; and Bertha did seem rather happier when she was fairly out of the dreary Bayswater lodgings, and established in Espérance's pretty drawing-room. George was in the City all day, and the time passed slowly when she was alone, but in the Magnays' house there was a brightness and geniality in the very atmosphere which roused her from her depression of spirits. After a time her visits there became almost daily institutions, she would sit nursing little Noel by the hour, or talking sadly yet with a kind of pleasure of Rilchester and the Deanery, and the bygone times. Espérance was only too glad to have her, and was always bright and

cheerful while she was present, but after she had gone her face would become thoughtful and sad, and sometimes a tear would fall on the baby's white frock as she thought over poor Bertha's troubles.

'If my uncle would only relent,' she used to say to Claude, when most troubled by Bertha's paleness and depression.

'Well, *chérie*,' Claude would reply, 'you and Noel must go to Rilchester and touch his heart, that is the only plan I can think of.'

And Espérance would laugh, and hold her baby more closely, while she declared that his little brown face would be worse than useless.

Strangely enough, before the summer was over, it seemed likely that a visit to Rilchester might really take place. Claude had a commission for another picture in Rilchester Cathedral from a friend of the Worthingtons, who had seen and greatly admired his picture of the south aisle, and it was arranged that they should go there early in the autumn. Espérance was very anxious to see Cornelia, but perhaps she was more relieved than otherwise when a letter arrived from Mrs. Mortlake, expressing great regret that the house would be full all through October, and that it would be impossible to accommodate them. She had no great love for the Deanery, and felt sure that it would be far more convenient to have their own rooms at the 'Spread Eagle,' where Claude could choose his own hours and make as great a litter as he pleased. Frances tried hard to persuade them to stay at Worthington, but much as they would both have liked this it was too far from the Cathedral to be convenient, and Claude's work was of course the first consideration.

Cornelia was the only one who did not quite like the arrangement, she would greatly have preferred having

Espérance in the house, however, Christabel, as usual, raised objections, and Cornelia, who never could argue on household orderings without being worsted, was obliged to submit.

She came to the station to meet them on the day of their arrival, and was delighted to find Espérance not the least changed, perhaps looking even younger than before her marriage. She could hardly realise at first that the *bonne* in the snowy white cap, and the fine, dark-eyed boy of nine months, really belonged to her; nor was Claude, with his still boyish face, and easy artistic dress, at all like a *pater-familias*.

Rilchester seemed but little altered, and Espérance looked at the quiet streets and picturesque houses with an odd sort of affection; she had learnt a great deal while she lived there, and she could look back upon the suffering now with undisturbed serenity, seeing how good had come out of the evil. It was curious to drive down the very streets which she used to pass through on her way to and from the Priory, to recall the long, weary walks, her terror when it grew dusk, and her encounter with the gang of workmen, and then to look to the other side of the carriage and to see Claude giving a blithe recognition to the Precentor, and little Noel gazing with wide-opened eyes at all about him. How little she had dreamt in those dark days of the possessions which were awaiting her in the future.

On the following day they were to dine at the Deanery, and Mrs. Mortlake and Dean Collinson came to see them before the afternoon service. Christabel was of course as polite and amiable as possible, and put on her very best company manners, but Espérance knew she did not really like her any better than before, and disliked the fussing politeness almost more than the former sharp fault-finding

The Dean, too, seemed more pompous than ever; she had mentioned Bertha's name to him, but he had looked displeased, and had at once changed the subject. On the whole the visit had been a disappointing one, and she felt weary and depressed.

'Why, my little "Mariana," said Claude, as he returned from seeing the visitors out, and found Espérance with the shadow of that old look on her face, 'what has been troubling you?'

'I don't know,' said Espérance, half laughing, and allowing herself to be ensconced on the sofa, 'I am cross and stupid to-day, and somehow after our long happiness it seems rather a weight to come back to Christabel. And uncle Collinson seems heartless, he did not even care to hear of Bertha.'

'And if you've no burden of your own, you take other people's,' said Claude, smiling. 'Never mind, *chérie*, it will come right in time, try to go to sleep, and prepare for this evening.'

'That tiresome dinner,' sighed Espérance, 'the rooms will be so hot.'

'We will not go if you are not up to it,' said Claude, drawing down the blind. 'From the look of the sky I rather fancy there's a storm brewing, and that will make an excuse.'

'No, no! we must go,' said Espérance, more cheerfully. 'I would not disappoint Cornelia for anything,' and she closed her eyes and settled herself resolutely to go to sleep, while Claude watched her a little anxiously, hoping it had not been imprudent of him to bring her to Rilchester at this time.

CHAPTER XXXV.

'Why need I fear when night may come,
If it will bring its moon and star;
Or what to me is sorrow's gloom,
If it will show me worlds afar?
May we but keep a constant mood,
Thus changeless through vicissitude,
Till in the strength of holy love,
We see things in the light in which they're seen above.'

REV. ISAAC WILLIAMS.

'MR. and Mrs. Magnay!'

The heavy door was thrown back, the tall footman stood aside, and Espérance found herself once more in the purple drawing-room. Mrs. Mortlake had not come down, but Cornelia came forward with her kind and real welcome, and Espérance's old friends, Mrs. Lowdell and her daughter Grace were also there. She was glad to be able to tell them all about Gaspard, and she did not mind recalling the past troubles which had happened during their last visit, now that she could look across the room to where her husband stood in conversation with the Dean.

Dean Collinson had for the time lost his pomposity—he was talking very eagerly.

'I have been busy in the observatory,' Espérance heard him say, 'we must go up there after dinner.'

Then in a minute both crossed the room to the window-seat where she was sitting.

'Let us come one moment, *chérie*, we want to see what kind of night it is,' and Claude drew aside the heavy purple curtains, and looked out intently, shading his eyes from the light within.

It was quite dusk, but not too dark to prevent their

seeing great rolling masses of cloud away to the south-east.

'A thunder-storm,' said Claude, 'if I'm not mistaken; I thought it would have come on sooner, the sky was so lurid this afternoon.'

'Provoking!' said the Dean, 'it will prevent us from taking our observations, but it will pass over I've no doubt.'

Dinner was announced just then. Espérance sat next to Cornelia, and had so much to tell her, that she got through the tediously long infliction better than she had expected. The gentlemen did not stay downstairs long, directly after tea they adjourned to the observatory, and Miss Grace Lowdell having expressed a wish to go up too, Cornelia and Espérance followed with her.

Espérance was glad to peep into her old attic room, now filled with Bella's playthings, and she could not repress a little shiver as she remembered how much she had gone through there. She held Cornelia's hand more closely, and crossed the landing quickly to the observatory, where Claude was working away at the great cog-wheel which turned the domed roof, so as to open it for the telescope, which was not yet adjusted.

Miss Lowdell was enchanted, she had never been in the observatory before, and had no idea what ingenious machinery existed there. The Dean had called Cornelia to the adjoining room, and Espérance and Miss Lowdell had just climbed up the flight of steps on to the little wooden stage, when a sudden and very vivid flash of lightning startled them both.

'Oh, pray let us get down,' said Miss Lowdell, nervously. 'We seem so terribly near to it up here. It must be the beginning of a storm.'

'Yes,' said Espérance, with a slight shiver, as another

flash succeeded, quickly followed by a tremendous clap of thunder.

She had a great horror of thunder-storms, and as Claude came half-way up the steps to help her down, her hand felt cold and tremulous.

'You must come downstairs, darling,' he said decisively. 'There is no use in our being up here till the storm has passed.'

'Noel will be so frightened,' she said, pleadingly, 'don't you think I might go home to him?'

'What! in the middle of the storm?'

'It has not begun to rain yet, and it is not far, besides, the lightning will not be worse out of doors than it is here. Cornelia will understand how it is—will you not?' she said, turning to her cousin, who had just rejoined them.

'Quite,' said Cornelia, kindly, 'you must do just what you like, dear.'

'Then I will go please, Claude, for I shall not feel happy about Noel; you know Marie is very young.'

'Considerably older than her small mistress,' said Claude, with a comical look.

Cornelia and Miss Lowdell both laughed, while Espérance drew herself up with an expression of mock dignity.

'I was twenty last birthday, and you've no business to laugh at me now I am out of my teens.'

They laughed all the more, however, and it was not until another still more vivid flash startled them all, that they left the observatory, Cornelia and Miss Lowdell joining Christabel in the drawing-room, and Claude and Espérance returning to their hotel.

There was a heavy oppressiveness about the atmosphere—not a single star was visible—and as they crossed the open square which led from the Deanery to the Vicar's Court the darkness seemed to press almost painfully on

their sight. They had scarcely reached the old gateway when a flash—if flash it could be called—which seemed to them like a mass of golden-red fire, blazed past them, while simultaneously came the most appalling thunder-clap.

Espérance was half deafened by it for a moment, but her terror was conquered by her amaze. She had never seen or heard anything so grandly awful. Claude put his arm round her.

'Do not be frightened, darling, that is most likely the worst we shall have.'

'Did the Cathedral tower fall?' she asked. 'Surely something fell in that great crash—something is falling now! Oh, listen!'

Claude turned back towards the Deanery—the direction from which the noise came. The lamplight was too dim to reveal much, but the next moment the lightning illumined the old house, and in that brief glance they could see that the observatory had been altogether wrecked. The jagged and irregular outline stood out darkly against the bright sky, then in an instant the black darkness veiled it from their sight.

'Cornelia! my uncle! Oh, Claude, they must be killed!' cried Espérance, in an agony of grief. 'Let us go back!'

Claude was struck dumb by that terrible revelation; he could not refuse her and they hurried back to the house, where all was confusion. By the time they reached the door Mrs. Mortlake, with poor little terrified Bella, had rushed out, Mrs. and Miss Lowdell hurried after her, while the servants had already fled and were standing on the grass in front of the house, huddled together in their fright.

'Oh, Espérance, it has been so terrible!' said Mrs.

Mortlake, clinging to her. 'If it had been ten minutes later Bella would have been upstairs!'

'Are you all safe?' asked Espérance, shuddering.

'I do not know. We were sitting in the drawing-room when that fearful flash came, and the whole house seemed to tremble and vibrate, and——'

But Espérance interrupted her—'Where is Cornelia?'

No one knew.

'And the Dean!' said Mrs. Lowdell. 'Where is the Dean?'

The little crowd round the house had increased, but the neighbourhood was so quiet and retired that it was still small; there was a low, awed murmur, as a dead silence followed Mrs. Lowdell's question.

Just then a light was seen within the hall; it approached slowly, and Espérance gave a glad cry as she discerned Cornelia carefully crossing the pavement, which was strewn with fallen beams and broken fragments of glass. But as she came nearer her fixed, ashy-white face put all rejoicing to flight, and fear made everyone speechless.

Claude went to meet her and first broke the silence.

'We have been so anxious about you!' he said hurriedly. 'I hope you bring us news of the Dean?'

She turned her rigid face towards him.

'I cannot reach him. He was in the anteroom, close to the observatory, when we came down—the way is impassable now!'

'Someone must go up and find him,' said Mrs. Mortlake, and she called the footman; but the danger was great, and the footman hung back reluctantly.

Claude left Cornelia then for a moment, and drew Espérance a little apart from the crowd.

'Darling,' he said, gently, 'I must see if I cannot help

to find your uncle. Will you go back to baby? Mrs. Lowdell will go with you, I am sure.'

'I cannot go till you come down again,' said Espérance, trembling. 'And oh, Claude, it will be so dangerous! Must you—need you go?'

He held her closely.

'It seems the only chance, darling. I know the house thoroughly, and am young and strong. The Dean is a feeble old man, I cannot leave him without help—you would not wish me to do so.'

'No, no!' sobbed Espérance, 'you must go, only let me wait here.'

'But the rain is so heavy—it is so bad for you, and the storm is not over.'

'I do not mind it—see, I do not even start now at the lightning!' she pleaded. 'Only let me stay here and I will be quite good and quiet—it would be much worse for me to have to go.'

He yielded to her entreaties, and bending down, kissed her, caught her hands in his, and said in low, hurried tones, 'Pray for us, darling—and trust.'

'Yes,' she replied, earnestly—'always.'

The last word passed her lips half-dreamily—she could not have given her reason for adding it. The lamplight fell fully on Claude's face now; she looked up into his clear, grave, blue eyes—one last, long look—then he stooped once more to kiss her, wrapped her cloak more closely round her, and walked hurriedly away. For a minute Espérance strained her eyes to follow him in the dim light. Someone brought him a lantern, he spoke a few words to Cornelia and then walked up the steps and disappeared in the darkness. Her head drooped then, and she leant against the lamp-post for support, waiting with folded hands and closed eyes.

People gathered round her, and talked hopefully, but she could not heed them; she never raised her eyes until a half-whispered remark roused her—'Poor Miss Collinson seems quite stunned.' Then she drew nearer to the door where Cornelia was standing, and put her arm round her waist, and held one of her cold hands in hers. Cornelia looked at her pityingly.

'My poor child, you ought not to be here.'

'It will not hurt me, he told me I might stay—we will wait together,' she replied.

'Tell Christabel and the others to go under shelter somewhere,' said Cornelia, uttering the words with difficulty.

Espérance obeyed, and Mrs. Mortlake and her guests accepted the offer of one of the Minor Canons, and took refuge in the Vicar's Court. Then Espérance returned again to Cornelia, and the two women waited in silence through minutes which in their agony of suspense seemed like hours—waited in the pouring rain, and the chill of the autumn night, unheedful of all around, each knowing that the life most dear to her in the world was in mortal danger.

There was an expectant hush; everyone was listening intently for some sign which might tell of Claude's success, yet to Espérance it seemed as if the quiet court had never before been so noisy. Her ears were strained to catch the faintest sound from the house, and the low whispers of the lookers-on, the ceaseless drip of the rain on the gravel, and the distant roll of the thunder, seemed almost more than she could endure.

Claude's friend, Mr. White, and two or three servants and neighbours, had ventured as far as the hall, and were the first to hear the shout from above. Cornelia and Espérance heard the voice but could not distinguish the words. Mr. White hurried out to them, however—it was all right, the Dean was unhurt. Cornelia uttered a fervent

thanksgiving, then again there was unbroken silence while the perilous descent was made down the shattered and almost impassable staircase. Ladders had been procured, but they had proved too short and could not be adjusted, nor was the feeble old Dean very anxious to try them.

Claude had found him in the room adjoining the observatory, or rather among its ruins, just recovering from the shock of the accident which had at first stunned him. He was safe and unhurt, but so much agitated that to convey him safely down again was no easy matter. The wooden balustrade and more than half of the stairs themselves had been crushed by the falling in of the observatory, and the *débris* was strewn so thickly on the remaining portion that walking was very difficult; more than once the Dean turned giddy, and was obliged to pause, but at length the worst part of the descent was over, and they could see the faces of the watchers in the hall. They had just reached the top of the last flight where the foothold was rather more sure, when the Dean with fresh confidence began to move more quickly, missed his footing, grasped hold of Claude, slipped down a step or two, but finally recovered himself.

Claude, however, could not resist the sudden shock, the Dean was next to the wall, but he was on the outside, on the very verge of the broken and shattered stairs. For an instant he struggled hard to right himself, but in vain; the Dean glancing round, held the wall for protection with one hand, and with the other clutched despairingly at his rescuer. But it was useless, Claude fell heavily into the hall below.

The noise, the horrified exclamations of those within the house, and the sudden movement to the foot of the stairs, all served to tell Cornelia and Espérance that some disaster had happened. Cornelia at once hurried up the

steps, and Espérance instinctively followed her, but suddenly remembering that she had promised Claude not to go into the house, she stopped herself, though the longing to know if he were safe was almost irrepressible. It was the first time that her vow of obedience had directly clashed with her will; the temptation was great but she resisted it, not knowing that that simple obedience was to be her salvation. She could not have borne the terrible shock of the sight which greeted Cornelia as she hastened forward into the hall and joined the group standing beside the staircase. Someone had helped the Dean down in safety, but Cornelia could hardly think of him, she could only gaze as if spell-bound at Claude's motionless, rigid form, and at the blood flowing fast from a wound in his head. Was he only stunned, or was this—? She could not frame her lips to the question, nor could anyone present have answered it. Mr. White hastily despatched one of the servants for a doctor, and Cornelia, remembering that Espérance must be prepared, and spared as much as possible, returned to the door.

But her heart failed her when she saw the anxiously expectant face of the poor little wife;—wife was she, or widow? She held out her hands and tried to speak, but no words would come. Espérance gathered the worst from that, but those awful moments of suspense had not been wasted, she was strong to endure the anguish that awaited her, and instinctively she thought first of sparing Cornelia.

'Do not be afraid to tell me,' she said, in a strangely calm voice; 'it cannot hurt me more than this. Claude is——?'

'Seriously hurt, dear Espérance; he has fallen and is stunned.'

'You are not deceiving me? You are sure?'

'We hope, darling. We shall be sure when the doctor comes.'

'I must go to him, take me please, Cornelia,' and she held out her hand feebly to be guided.

But Cornelia would not let her come beyond the porch, she dared not take her to the scene of the accident, it would be safer she thought if Claude were moved to the outer air, and Mr. White and one of the servants raised him and carried him out.

Espérance had turned cold and faint, but the sight of her husband revived her, terrible though it was. She took off her cloak and spread it on the ground of the porch, then signed to them where to place him, and, supporting his head, wiped his face with her handkerchief. The others looked on sadly, they had scarcely any hope. Cornelia quite dreaded the arrival of the doctor, so certain did she feel that his first words would blast poor Espérance's hopes.

Claude's death-like pallor and icy coldness had, however, misled them, the doctor reassured them; he was still living, but was unconscious from the effects of concussion of the brain. The Dean, who had been too much shocked till now to speak, fairly burst into tears on hearing this, all his pomposity vanished, and he sobbed like a child—'It is my doing—my doing!'

Cornelia could not soothe him, but as Claude was placed on a mattress, and borne slowly away to the hotel, Espérance seemed to awake to the recollection of others, and quickly perceiving how matters were, begged her uncle to come back with her. To Cornelia's great relief the Dean at once assented, gave Espérance his arm, and walked slowly away from the scene of the accident.

The storm had passed over and the rain had ceased, the air felt deliciously fresh and cool as they passed

through the gateway into the Vicar's Court. It roused Espérance from the chilly numbness of feeling into which she had fallen, the wave of grief and desolation surged in once more upon her heart, and it required all her strength of will to prevent her from breaking down utterly. She struggled hard with herself, and the Dean only noticed that her breath came in short, quick gasps, and slackened his pace. Just then they came to the Cathedral; there was no moon that night, but they could see the outline of the great, massive building looming out blackly even in the darkness. There was something so strong and unchangeable about it that Espérance was soothed and comforted. The lamplight shone over the smooth-cut turf, and revealed the old, white gravestones, then again in blackest shadow the great tower rose solemnly into the night sky, unshaken by the storm, steadfast and grand and immovable, just as it had stood for generations. It was merely a fancy of course, but the old walls seemed to be echoing with the sound of a distant chant, and instinctively she filled in the words, 'Lord, thou hast been our refuge from one generation to another.'

There was need of strength that evening, and in spite of her weariness Espérance kept up bravely, giving all the necessary directions quietly and without fuss, comforting the Dean, reassuring Cornelia, and doing everything which they would allow her to do for Claude. But hour after hour passed and there was no sign of returning consciousness, and Cornelia, as she waited outside the door for fresh tidings, knew that the doctors feared the worst. It was not till five in the morning that she saw Espérance again; she came out with a wan, wearied face, to order fresh water for the hot bottles, and would have returned at once had not Cornelia detained her.

'You are not fit to go back, dear; come and take a

rest, and you will be of much more use,' she said, earnestly.

'I cannot leave him; you know it may be only——' she could not finish her sentence, and Cornelia again urged her to rest, promising that she should be called at once if there were the slightest change. She was too much worn out to argue, and Cornelia led her into the room where little Noel lay sleeping peacefully in his crib. She lay down beside him on Marie's bed, not trying to check her fast-falling tears, and Cornelia, aware now that they would relieve her, was glad that it should be so.

Before long she slept, and did not wake again till it was broad daylight, the sunshine was streaming through the half-drawn curtains, and Noel, surprised that no one came to dress him, had pulled himself up in his crib and with one fat, dimpled arm thrust through the bars, was stroking her face. It was certainly the most merciful waking she could have had, and yet the pain was almost unbearable; she took her boy in her arms and felt a momentary comfort as the soft baby face nestled against hers, but the hot tears rained down her cheeks, and Noel who had never seen his mother cry, lifted up his big, astonished, brown eyes to her face, and undoubled his tiny hands to catch the drops, cooing to them in baby language as they fell.

After a time she recovered herself, and hastily dressing, left Noel with Marie and went to her husband's room. There was no improvement of any kind; Claude lay cold and motionless—she only knew that he still lived by the words spoken to her as she came in—'No change.' The weary day passed on to its close and night came; the next morning and the next night, and still only a continuation of that awful death in life. On the evening of the third day Espérance's hopes were raised, the

deathly stillness and pallor changed, the paralysed limbs moved once more, she watched breathlessly. But alas! there was no comfort in the wandering, unrecognising gaze of the blue eyes as they rested on her, the awaking was only to delirious ravings, and to feverish paroxysms terrible to witness.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

> 'Espère enfant demain, et puis demain encore,
> Et puis toujours demain, croyons dans l'avenir;
> Espère et chaque fois que s'élève l'aurore,
> Soyons là pour prier comme Dieu pour bénir.'
>
> VICTOR HUGO.

LADY WORTHINGTON and Frances were away at the time of the accident; there had been a wedding in the family, and they had been from home for a week, but the news of the disaster reached them very soon, and Lady Worthington's first object when she returned to Rilchester, was to go at once to see Espérance. Frances thought it best to defer her visit, and left her sister alone at the 'Spread Eagle,' after hearing at the door that Mr. Magnay was no better.

There was something very sad in that first visit. It was scarcely three months since Lady Worthington had seen Claude and Espérance happily settled in their London home, and had rejoiced in the happiness of her two *protégés;* now everything was grievously changed. She was shown into the deserted sitting-room and looked sadly round. The room had that peculiar air of desolation which hangs about any place where work and living has been abruptly stopped. Claude's palette and brushes were left on the sideboard just as he had thrown them down on the afternoon of that fatal day; his easel and an unfinished picture stood in the corner opposite. Would that canvas ever be used again? Lady Worthington could

not bear to look at it, and turned to the other side of the room; but it was only to see what touched her even more —a skein of soft, white wool, some knitting-needles, and a tiny baby's hood, evidently just made. The tears were in her eyes, when Espérance came quietly into the room with the hushed manner which people bring with them from a sick bed; she was very pale, but her smile had lost none of its radiance as she hastened forward to kiss Lady Worthington.

'It was very good of you to come—I have so wanted to see you!'

'My poor child! I have been so anxious about you! We only heard on Saturday, and could not come back till this morning. I am afraid you have no better account to give me?'

'No,' said Espérance, wearily. 'On Saturday evening there was a change, and inflammation set in. Now he has sunk again into a quiet, insensible state, and there seems so little one can do. The Dean has telegraphed this morning for some London doctor—he has been very kind.'

'Was he any the worse himself? I did not hear if he was injured at all?'

'No, he is unhurt.' And Espérance gave Lady Worthington all the details of the accident. While she was still talking a servant came in with the mid-day letters—two directed to 'Claude Magnay, Esquire,' which Espérance put down with a quick sigh, and one to herself from Gaspard. The tears rose to her eyes then—it was the first letter she had had from him since Claude's illness, and he of course knew nothing of her trouble; she could not bear to open it.

'I am very weak and silly to-day,' she said, sadly. 'But ever since that dreadful night I have had such a

longing for Gaspard—it is the feeling of having to stand alone, I suppose. You see I have been so taken care of—and now it is such an effort to think and arrange!'

'My dear, you are not fit for it—you are worn-out already.'

'I am only tired,' said Espérance, in a weary voice. "*On va bien loin depuis qu'on est las*"—there is great truth in that proverb.'

'But you will be very careful, dear—you will not over-exert yourself? Will not Cornelia see that you are prudent?'

'Yes, oh yes! Cornelia has been everything to me—she takes care of Noel—she does everything to save me—it was wrong of me to complain. I must keep well for Claude's sake. But that is enough about it! do tell me about Frances—it is good for me to think of other things!'

Lady Worthington could not enough admire the resolute way in which she turned from her troubles.

'Frances came back with me this morning,' she said. 'I wonder whether you have heard any rumours of her piece of news?'

'What!' exclaimed Espérance; 'is it really true, then! I heard a report that she was going to be married.'

'Trust Rilchester to be beforehand with gossip,' said Lady Worthington, smiling. 'But this is really true. Can you guess whom she is going to marry?'

Espérance thought for a minute.

'A clergyman of some sort, I suppose, Frances would make such a model clergyman's wife.'

'No,' said Lady Worthington, with an amused look; 'you are quite wrong.'

'Well, then—the squire of a country parish, where she will be a Lady Bountiful.'

'Right!' said Lady Worthington. 'And now who is the squire?—you know him, but he lives a long way from here.'

'The squire of a country parish, and I know him!' said Espérance, much puzzled. Then with a sudden remembrance—'Mr. Henderson! can it be Mr. Henderson?'

'Yes, it really is,' said Lady Worthington, smiling. 'You and Madame Lemercier, you see, have helped to find a husband for Frances.'

Espérance was really very much pleased at this piece of news, and Lady Worthington's visit had cheered and refreshed her.

'You always do me good,' she said, gratefully. 'Do you remember that first time you came to see me on the *jour des morts?* that will be just four years ago to-morrow.'

Lady Worthington remembered the visit well enough. Could it be only four years ago? How much had happened since then to her poor little *protégée!* She was taken upstairs to see Noel, and just as they passed Claude's room the door was opened, and Espérance beckoning her in, took her to the bedside.

She was greatly shocked; at first indeed she could hardly believe that it was Claude at all, so greatly was he changed. He was in a state of stupor, lying perfectly still and breathing heavily. His head had been shaved that morning, and this of course made him look much more ill. The sick-nurse had just left the room, and Espérance, putting on a clean muslinette apron and bib, took her place by the bed and began to change the ice-bladders. It was evidently a great relief to her to be able to do anything, and she was engrossed heart and soul in the present; but Lady Worthington trembled when she thought of the probable future.

Leaving Espérance with her husband, she went down again to the sitting-room, where she found the Dean waiting for the last accounts of Claude. He looked very much aged and shaken, and Lady Worthington fancying he would not care to see anyone, would have left after the first greeting and a few words of sympathy, but he begged her almost pathetically to stay.

'If you could tell me, Lady Worthington, what I can possibly do for that poor child, she is wearing herself out, and I seem powerless to help—both their deaths will lie at my door.'

'Espérance told me that Cornelia has been the greatest comfort to her,' said Lady Worthington, anxious to say something soothing, but the Dean only grew more agitated.

'Yes, Cornelia can help,' he said piteously, 'but I myself—I who caused all the trouble, can do nothing but watch the effects. Lady Worthington, I am an old man and a scholar, but now for the first time I have found that all my life has been lived for self, and because of that wrong motive, I have been self-deceived. I see it now all too plainly, but the punishment is very hard, very bitter. It is grievous to sit helplessly by, watching the ruin one has caused in the present, haunted by the spectres of past deeds. My sister—whom you yourself remember—M. de Mabillon, his son, even my own children, all rise up before me with reproaches. I see that you think this a strange confession for me to make, but I tell you this that you may know how all-important it is that I should find some means of helping Espérance. You know her better than anyone, you and Miss Neville, can you not think of something which I can do to relieve her?'

Lady Worthington's still beautiful face was full of sympathy, her humorous grey eyes were softened, and

beamed with a kindly light; years ago she had owned to her husband that she felt it would be a sheer impossibility to rouse the Dean from his selfishness, to a perception of his duties, and now from his own lips she was hearing that Claude and Espérance had succeeded in this. She paused for a moment before answering, then, with the hesitation of one who speaks while yet thinking out some doubtful point, she said, 'There is one way that has just occurred to me, in which I think you might perhaps help Mrs. Magnay. I know from what she said just now how much she longs to have her brother with her—would it be possible for him to be sent for?'

The Dean started to his feet with sudden animation.

'Lady Worthington, I don't know how to thank you enough, she must surely be relieved by that, and it had never struck me—you see I am not accustomed to think of other people, I have been self-engrossed, that is the fact, and now when I long to see how to help, and what to do, I am blind and powerless. But that is really a good idea! I will telegraph to Mr. Seymour, tell him to advance the necessary money to M. de—— to Gaspard, and offer any compensation which Mr. Seymour may think fit to charge for his sudden withdrawal.'

'I think you can hardly fail to comfort Espérance in this way,' said Lady Worthington, warmly, 'perhaps in case of disappointment, though, you would not tell her of the idea until you have an answer from Ceylon.'

The Dean fully agreed to this, and having escorted Lady Worthington to her carriage, sat down again in the Magnays' sitting-room to consider the wording of this all-important telegram. He had never been an illiberal man, although he had gained a reputation for being close-handed because he disliked anything which caused him personal

discomfort or trouble, but now that he was roused to take a real interest in something altogether outside himself he was really generous.

The visit of the London doctor took place a little later in the week, and the Dean built a great deal on it, hoping that his opinion would be more favourable, or that he would adopt some more active measures. He was terribly disappointed when Mr. Moore only confirmed the opinion of the Rilchester doctors—trepanning could not be attempted, in all probability the patient would never recover consciousness, but would sink in a few days. This was the opinion given to the Dean—the doctor faltered a little as Espérance drew him aside.

'You will not deceive me, I know,' she said, raising her clear brown eyes to his. 'Is there any hope of my husband's recovery?'

Never had the doctor been so strongly tempted to hold out false hopes. He was silent for a moment, looking at the poor little wife, so young and helpless, so unable to bear calamity. But those unflinching eyes would not allow him to prevaricate.

'It is *possible*, Madam,' he said, with emphasis.

Her lips quivered. She saw plainly how very little hope he had.

'How long?' she asked, in a tremulous voice.

'It may be a few days,' he answered, 'or it may possibly be weeks, or even months. There have been cases in which the patient has lingered on in this way and ultimately recovered, but it is only fair to tell you, Madam, they are *very* rare.'

She asked a few more questions, keeping back her tears bravely; then with a few words of hearty sympathy Mr. Moore took leave, hurrying away to catch the London train.

'A sad look out for that poor young thing!' he said to Mr. Maclaren, the Rilchester doctor, who accompanied him to the station. 'They have not been married long I hear.'

'Not two years,' replied Mr. Maclaren.

'Humph! they say Frenchwomen can't speak the truth, but they compel you to tell it, nevertheless. Fine eyes she had, and uncommon—the colour of Smyrna raisins exactly!'

Then the two doctors fell to talking of other matters, and in a few minutes the celebrity upon whom Dean Collinson's hopes had been centred, was being whirled away to London by the express.

For a few minutes after his departure Espérance allowed herself to give way to her overwhelming grief, then controlling herself once more, she paced slowly up and down the room, despairingly, but with the enforced quiet of a strong restraint. She paused for a minute at the window, but the November sunshine was streaming full into the room and she could not look out, her weary sight was dazzled by the brightness; as she lowered her eyes, however, they rested for an instant on her betrothal ring. The sunlight was illumining the raised letters! She read them over and over, at first dreamily, but afterwards with a sudden glad realisation—'*Espérez toujours!*'

She twisted the ring slowly from side to side, letting the light play brilliantly on each letter. What memories those words brought to her! She let her thoughts travel slowly back. Now she was in the little *salon* at Paris, with her father and Gaspard in their National Guard uniform, and those words were ringing in her ears in her father's own voice; then again she was at a crowded London terminus, the door of the carriage was shut and locked, and Gaspard was whispering those words of com-

fort to her; again—and her tears fell fast at the remembrance—she was walking with Claude along a straight, dusty road, bounded on each side by a vast plain, and she had told him that this was her motto, and he had remembered it, and reminded her of it as they stood, later on still, by the crusader's tomb; then on still further to the old Château, and the long hours of that Christmas Eve when Claude had repeated the words, and they had soothed her like a sort of charm; later still in that same day, and she was lying peacefully with her little son beside her, and Claude's bright face was bent down to hers, to whisper, '"*Espérez toujours!*" But what is the masculine for Espérance?' Those two precious words! Were not they indeed almost the last he had said to her? No, not quite! At that last terrible parting in the darkness, and storm, and tumult, a broader, grander word had risen to his lips; it was hope, but yet something better than hope.

Could she disobey his last charge to her? Could she shrink trembling from what must be best? For a few minutes she knelt in silence, and when she rose the despair and anguish had died out of her face—it was tear-stained, but quiet and serene.

Before long she went down to the sitting-room, where she found her uncle and Cornelia. The Dean was standing with his elbow on the mantelpiece; he looked up as she entered, then hastily concealed his face again. Cornelia made room for her by the fire, and for a few minutes no one broke the silence. She knew that they waited for her to begin, and with an effort she turned to her uncle.

'Did Mr. Moore tell you anything, uncle?'

The Dean looked up, and she was touched by the sight of his silent grief.

'You saw him yourself, my dear, did you not?'

'Yes,' said Espérance; 'and he told me the truth.'

'He fears the worst, my poor child——' but here the Dean's voice suddenly failed him. He turned away, and burying his face in his hands, sobbed unrestrainedly.

Cornelia, afraid that this would agitate Espérance, entreated him to control himself, but the disappointment of this last hope seemed to have crushed him, and he only moaned out sad words of self-accusation and vain regrets, repeating again that despairing sentence, 'The worst—he fears the worst!'

Espérance stood for a moment apart, as if gathering her strength, then she bent down gently and put her arm round the Dean's neck, and laid her soft cheek against his wrinkled one.

'It will be God's best for all of us,' she whispered.

The Dean could not but be comforted by her words—he pressed her hand in silence. Just then there was a quick knock at the door. Cornelia opened it and received a telegram for her father. With trembling fingers the Dean tore open the envelope and read the brief lines. It was from Mr. Seymour. Gaspard had already started, and in accordance with the Dean's wish would come by the overland route, they might expect him the last week in November.

They told Espérance quietly, and her thankful happiness gladdened the Dean's heart. It seemed a ray of comfort in that dark day of disappointment; yet none of them dared to look forward to the end of those three weeks.

Day after day the Dean's voice, husky and trembling, asked the prayers of the congregation in the Cathedral for Claude Magnay; day after day Espérance watched and waited beside her husband's sick bed—watched with an intensity of hope, waited trustfully for that which should be sent.

Cornelia tried not to be anxious about her, but she

longed unspeakably for Gaspard's arrival, knowing that his presence would be a greater comfort and help to Espérance than anything else. It was with a feeling of unspeakable relief that she received the telegram which he sent from London. She herself went to the Rilchester station to meet him, longing for his arrival and yet dreading it, and as she paced up and down the platform, waiting for the train, recalling sadly her first introduction to her cousin years ago at the great London terminus.

He was not so greatly changed as she had expected. It was the same slight, trim figure, the same rather grave face, clear, brown eyes, and drooping moustache, only that the healthy, bronzed complexion made him look younger and handsomer than when she had last seen him.

She held out her hand, welcoming him with the answer to the question which she knew was on his lips.

'Claude is still living, still unconscious.'

'And Espérance?'

'As well as we can expect. She thought it better not to come to meet you, she is bearing up wonderfully.'

Gaspard asked anxiously for details of Claude's accident and illness, for the telegram had been necessarily brief, and had only furnished him with the leading facts and the urgent need of his presence. He listened sadly to Cornelia's account, she could not conceal from him the hopelessness of the case. Very sadly he walked up the steps at the entrance of the hotel. Cornelia led the way to the sitting-room, and he followed her down the long, dark corridor. At the sound of their footsteps, however, a door at the end was quickly opened, the light streamed down the passage, and looking up, he saw Espérance in the doorway.

'*Chérie!*' he cried.

'Gaspard!' It was the only word which would pass

her lips, she let him fold her in his arms, while her tears rained down silently.

Cornelia left them together, and after a few minutes Espérance was better able to feel the full comfort of Gaspard's presence, and yet to both of them there was something inexpressibly sad about this return; the meeting which they had so often talked over, and had planned so joyfully, was indeed different to their expectations. It was not till Noel's baby voice was upraised, that Espérance dried her tears, and Gaspard's sorrowful face brightened.

'Your little boy!' he exclaimed, 'I have not seen him.' Then as Noel crawled towards them, with slow but resolute baby efforts, 'Why, he is a regular De Mabillon, eyes and all.'

'Yes,' said Espérance, lifting him up to greet his uncle, 'I think he will be like our father.'

Just at that moment she was called away to Claude's room, and Gaspard was left alone with Noel, who did not quite know what to make of this new arrival; he was beginning to twist the corners of his baby mouth ominously, when the door opened and Dean Collinson entered.

He had greatly dreaded meeting Gaspard, but when he saw his grave, sorrowful face, his courage suddenly revived —the sorrow seemed to unite them.

'I am heartily glad you have come, Gaspard,' he said, holding out his hand.

Gaspard made his grave and rather formal greeting, he could not bring himself to speak very warmly. The old man was for a moment repulsed, but he had grown strangely humble, and he said nothing, only a grieved look passed over his face. Then at once Gaspard's better self returned, he spoke courteously and gratefully.

'I have a great deal to thank you for,' he said, 'it was very considerate of you to send for me, and the journey——'

The colour glowed in Gaspard's cheeks, his eyes shone with a bright light, and his face expressed at once surprise, admiration, and relief. For a moment there was silence, then he spoke warmly.

'In the name of my father and mother, I do forgive you, uncle. As for my own pardon, I do not feel that I have a right to use such a term to one so much my senior. You disliked me—I was aware of it, and returned the dislike; necessarily there was coldness between us. I have to thank you now for first breaking the ice.'

The Dean held out his hand, and Gaspard grasped it in silence, while Noel kicked and crowed lustily, evidently finding the family reconciliation very amusing.

After this Dean Collinson seemed really happier, though of course the long, wearing anxiety about Claude still weighed heavily on his spirits. It was wonderful, however, how much comfort he met with from the least likely quarters; people who a short time before would only have bowed to him with cold respect, now ventured to stop him in the street, and actually to sympathise with him—the sensation was novel and pleasing. His observatory and his telescope were shattered to a thousand fragments. Rilchester felt real pity for one thus rudely deprived of his hobby, and people tried to interest him in other matters instead. He meekly consented to be pleased with almost anything, he allowed the Precentor to persecute him with Wagner, he gave his consent to several long-desired improvements in the Cathedral, he made schemes for helping the parochial clergy, and took a leading part in all the winter charities. Even his sermons shared in the general change; they were no longer the dry, learned discourses of former years, but clever, earnest, powerful sermons, which people flocked to hear; the Dean was rapidly gaining the respect and affection which, in the

days of his exclusiveness and self-indulgence, had never been accorded to him.

The short December days passed quickly by. The long nights succeeded each other one by one in endless monotony, and still Claude lingered on almost miraculously; the long unconsciousness still remained unbroken.

The last evening of the year came—a still, cold, frosty night. Espérance found it hard then not to fear, almost impossible not to glance on tremblingly at the future. She listened to the Cathedral bells as they rang out clearly in the frosty air, and tried to take courage, but never before had it seemed so hard to trust patiently. She had little sleep that night—at last, when her restlessness grew unbearable, she rose and dressed herself, and went to her husband's room, where Gaspard had been keeping watch to relieve the sick-nurse.

He gave her his New-year's greeting sadly. What a *Jour de l'an* was this! She bent down to kiss her husband's unconscious brow, then turned away to the window to hide her tears. The night-lamp burnt low; she drew up the blind softly and looked out.

Many times before she had seen the dawn, but never had it looked so beautiful to her as now. Over the hard, frozen earth there rose the soft, grey, pearly hue of morning; far off in the city she could see the faint yellow gleam of the street lamps, while above in brightest contrast, in the midst of the beautiful greyish-green haze, hung the morning star, large and radiant, almost dazzling in its brilliancy.

Gaspard's voice suddenly recalled her.

'*Chérie*, come here!'

She hastened to the bedside. The heavy breathing had grown more quiet, the arms were moved slightly, the eyelids quivered. Gaspard went to summon the nurse

from the adjoining room; Espérance waited, scarcely able to breathe for the terrible suspense. Was this a change for life or death? One minute more and the long, long waiting was over! Claude's blue eyes—quiet, unchanged, recognising, looked into hers! He smiled, and his long-sealed lips uttered one faint word—'Espérance!'

The look, the smile, the one word were all she could have—but she was contented. She let Gaspard lead her from the room at once, and in a few minutes he had taken the news to the Deanery, and had brought Cornelia back to Espérance. The reconciliation with the Dean had long been effected, but even had he not asked so humbly for pardon, Gaspard must have forgiven him all when he saw the intensity of his thankfulness at Claude's restoration. Even Mrs. Mortlake gave a sincere expression of joy, and Dean Collinson was so much agitated that it seemed doubtful if he would be sufficiently recovered in time for the morning service. He went however, and endured the long new-year's sermon patiently. It was twelve o'clock before the full service was completed, then he hurried off at once to the hotel.

No one was in the sitting-room. He waited anxiously for some minutes; at last Cornelia stole quietly down the passage with a reassuring face.

'Claude?' asked the Dean—he could hardly speak for emotion.

'He is going on well, the doctors are quite satisfied—only he must be kept perfectly quiet.' Then as the Dean turned away, she continued with a smile, 'But we have another new-year's gift, father, to be thankful for!'

The Dean turned around half apprehensively. 'What! they never told me——'

'All has gone well,' said Cornelia, in a calm, glad voice—'Espérance has a little daughter!'

That day the Dean exercised his prerogative, and altered the anthem chosen to the opening chorus from the 'Hymn of Praise.'

Some people declared that it was an unsuitable anthem for the new year, but they knew very little about it. Dean Collinson's head was bowed throughout; people wondered that he did not stand up, or show in some way that he shared the spirit of the words, 'All things with life and breath, praise ye the Lord!' But perhaps there had never before been in the Cathedral, praise more true, and humble, and heartfelt, than that which rose from the hoary-headed Dean, who shaded his eyes with his hand lest anyone should see the tears of thankfulness which he could not check.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

'Blest be Thy dew, and blest Thy frost,
And happy I to be so crost,
And cured by crosses at Thy cost.

For as Thy hand the weather steers,
So thrive I best twixt joys and tears,
And all the year have some green ears.'

HENRY VAUGHAN.

CLAUDE's recovery was slow, but there were no relapses; he had now nothing but weakness to struggle against, and day by day he made real and perceptible progress. It was not for several weeks, however, that they ventured to let Espérance come into his room, they dreaded the excitement for both alike, and Espérance was obliged to content herself with her little blue-eyed baby, while Claude was able to grumble to his heart's content to Gaspard—the only person allowed to come into his room except the sick-nurse. He was the very man to be with an invalid—quiet

and ready, sympathetic and yet firm, and Claude found some comfort in his strong resemblance to Espérance.

One day, however, when they were talking together, Gaspard happened to say something in French; Claude stared at him—he could not understand a word. It was rather a shock to both of them, but the doctor made light of it, assuring him that in time it would come back to him. It was exactly the same in other things. He took up a newspaper one day—the first time he had been allowed to move from the bed, to a couch at the other end of the room—but to his dismay, instead of a refreshment it was a serious labour—in ten minutes he had with difficulty spelt through two or three lines—it was like learning to read over again.

Every time the doctor came he was besieged by impatient questions—How was his wife, and when might he see her? Espérance's recovery had been very slow and protracted, and the meeting was postponed day after day till Claude's patience was fairly exhausted. One morning he worked himself up into such an excitement, in trying to prove how much better it would be for both of them to see each other, that the doctor began to waver. Espérance had had a bad night, however, and was really not equal to any exertion. Mr. Maclaren would not suggest it to her, but he asked if she would spare the baby.

Claude was still talking fiercely to Gaspard of the folly and uselessness of such precautions, when his door was opened and the doctor looked in once more.

'Mrs. Magnay sends you a small deputy,' he said with a smile, then standing back he made way for the monthly-nurse, who walked in with an important air, and placed a small, closely-wrapped bundle on Claude's arm. The baby was asleep; he unfolded the shawls, and looked long and earnestly at the little face. It was doubtless much like

other baby faces, but to his eyes a likeness was to be traced in every feature. The little, pointed, dimpled chin, the small mouth, the well-formed nose, at present almost out of proportion to the rest of the face, the soft, dark, clear skin, and a most unusual quantity of curly, dark-brown hair, very noticeable in such a young baby, all served to make his little girl a very comforting 'deputy.'

'She will be very like Espérance,' he said, glancing up, and Gaspard fancied there were tears in his eyes, but he hastily stooped down again and kissed the little unconscious forehead gratefully, almost reverently.

'I believe Espérance has been comforting herself with the small woman's likeness to you,' said Gaspard with a laugh. 'Time will show which is right, but her eyes are certainly yours.'

She was obliging enough to wake before long, and slowly to lift her sleepy eyelids, and Gaspard was certainly right. The eyes which had been Espérance's comfort for the last five weeks were not the least like the De Mabillons —the colour of Smyrna raisins as the London doctor said —but large, well-opened, dark-blue eyes, already expressing something of Claude's ready observation and intelligence.

It was two or three days after this that Espérance was allowed to make her first visit to the sick room. Gaspard brought her to the door, just witnessing the dawning joy of each face, the glow of colour which rose to Espérance's cheeks, and the bright, eager welcome from Claude; then he left them to their happiness, and went to see Dean Collinson.

One of the Dean's many schemes was to induce Mr. Seymour to part with Gaspard. He could not endure the thought of his return to Ceylon, and he had written some time before to urge the coffee-planter to transfer him to the house of business in London. Mr. Seymour was fond

of Gaspard, and of course grumbled at the proposal, but it happened that at that time the change was really feasible. Mr. Seymour's younger brother had just died; Gaspard was fully competent to take his place, and although, owing to his want of capital, he could not at present be received as a partner, yet the coffee-planter hinted that in time this difficulty might be surmounted. The salary was a good one, and the Dean suggested the change hopefully. Gaspard did not take long to make up his mind. English fogs and vapours with Espérance, and the perfect climate of Dickoya without her, was to him a choice which required little weighing; the decision to stay in England was at once made, and Espérance's delight warmed the Dean's heart.

It was while she was talking with him on this subject one afternoon in March that she resolved to speak to him of what had long been on her mind. 'You are doing so much to make me happy, uncle,' she said with a momentary hesitation, 'it seems almost wrong to ask you to do something else, and yet there is one thing which I very much want.'

'My dear!' exclaimed the Dean, 'let me hear it at once; if it is anything I can do I shall be delighted.'

'I am not sure whether it is,' said Espérance, musingly, 'but I hope it is. I want Bertha to come to Rilchester, uncle. I want George and Bertha to be at baby's christening.'

The Dean paced up and down the room three or four times in silence; then he stopped, and taking Espérance's hand in his, he said gently, 'Yes, my dear, you are right —what am I, indeed, that I should refuse forgiveness to any! I will write to Bertha myself. When is your little girl to be christened?'

'We thought we should like Easter Day, if it will be

convenient, uncle. Mr. Maclaren thinks that Claude may go then.'

'And is the name decided?'

'Claude says one name must be Espérance, but we have not chosen the other.' Then with a sudden thought she continued, 'Is there any name you would like, uncle?'

There was a strange huskiness in the Dean's voice as he replied, 'Yes, Espérance, if you and Claude approve, there is one name I should very much like—your mother's name—Amy.'

Frances Neville, Cornelia, and Gaspard were to be the godparents. The christening had been deferred till Easter on Claude's account, but that was the utmost limit which could be allowed, for Mr. Henderson and Frances were to be married in the following week, and Espérance had set her heart on their presence.

'I feel that my little girl belongs to you in a way already,' she said one day to Frances, who was driving her over to Worthington Hall in her little pony-carriage. 'When she is older you will have to teach her all that you have taught her mother. I think Maggie is a very happy little girl; we shall all envy her when she has you to herself in the country.'

'Dear little Maggie,' said Frances, thoughtfully, 'if I thought I should be half as wise with her as Madame Lemercier has been I should be happy.'

'I heard from Madame only last week,' said Espérance. She wrote so happily; her passage is taken, and she goes to Australia to join Monsieur next month.'

'Yes, she has promised to stay with Maggie till we come home,' said Frances. 'We mean to dispense with a regular wedding tour, and to have a few quiet weeks in Cornwall instead; then in the summer Norman says we must all meet down in Wales. Maggie and Kathie will

so enjoy being together, and I think you and Claude and the babies ought to come too, it will not feel at all right if you are not there, and Claude will want a change of air by that time.'

'It would be very delightful,' said Espérance, 'but that is looking rather far ahead.'

They reached the Hall as she spoke, and Mr. Henderson, who was staying there, came down the steps to greet them.

'You remember Mrs. Magnay, Norman,' said Frances, 'we have already been discussing our next meeting in Wales.'

Mr. Henderson shook hands with her warmly. He had not seen her since her wedding-day, but in spite of all she had been through, she was not much altered; it was the same gravely sweet face, only there seemed greater depth in the eyes, and a more patient firmness about the mobile lips.

Frances had much to talk of, and there was a sort of sadness about the visit, because it was probably the last which Espérance would be able to make before the bustle and confusion of the wedding week began. But Lady Worthington reminded them cheerfully that Devonshire was one of the loveliest counties, and prophesied that before long Claude would have commissions in the neighbourhood of Frances' new home.

Espérance stayed as long as she could well be spared from home, and then, as Frances was tired, Mr. Henderson drove her back to Rilchester in the pony carriage. She was glad to have this opportunity of seeing him, for although she had from the first thought him very pleasant, she was not quite sure that he was altogether worthy of Frances, indeed, from her very slight acquaintance it was impossible for her to judge. He talked to her kindly, and quite in the way she liked, of Claude's illness; then the

conversation turned to Madame Lemercier and her happiness at the prospect of rejoining her husband; and finally it drifted on naturally to recollections of their meeting in Wales, while Espérance was delighted to tell of all Frances' kindness to her, and Mr. Henderson was of course delighted to listen. By the end of the drive they were firm friends, and Espérance felt quite sure now that she liked Frances' future husband.

George and Bertha were expected on the following day—the Thursday in Holy Week. Everyone a little dreaded their arrival; even Cornelia, though thankful that her father had sent the invitation, half shrank from seeing her sister. All passed off, however, better than she had feared. The real joy of having Bertha once more at home overcame the painfulness of the first meeting, and though they were quiet and subdued, they were none the less really glad and thankful to be all together once more.

Espérance, fancying that the first return would not be very pleasant to Bertha, had planned the excitement of Claude's first visit to the Deanery for the following day, and their coming was such a pleasure to the Dean, and such an event, that it seemed to put them all at their ease again. No one quite understood why it was that, on the second day, no more awkward silences fell in the family circle, excepting perhaps George; he could not help letting Espérance know that he appreciated her thoughtfulness.

'From the first time I saw you years ago at Paris, I knew that you were blessed with that rarest gift of tact, Mrs. Magnay, but I did not imagine how much I should be indebted to you in future years. Your visit to-day has thawed us all.'

'Claude's visit, you mean,' said Espérance, smiling. 'It is the first time he has been here since the accident,

and the Dean wants to show him all the alterations and improvements.'

'I hear the Dean is not going to have his observatory rebuilt—is that true?'

'He says he shall not at present,' replied Espérance, 'but he has engaged a first-rate lecturer to give a course of lessons on astronomy in Rilchester; and I believe if the people take up the subject at all warmly, he will build another observatory, which may be used by the public.'

'I must say he looks all the better for being without his hobby. I suppose he gets out of doors more, instead of being shut up all day studying and spending half the night in star-gazing.'

Espérance glanced across at the Dean, and smiled. He certainly did look much happier and much less infirm than in former times, but she did not think the change was altogether owing to the loss of the telescope.

Easter-Day was cold and unseasonable; in spite of its being in the middle of April there was snow on the ground, and the cold east wind blew gustily round the walls of the Cathedral, whistling through the louver-boards in the towers, and vainly seeking for an entrance at the closed doors and windows. But the hurricane without only made the calm within seem more restful, and the fitful gleams of sunshine streaming through the stained-glass windows, cast a fleeting radiance on the group gathered round the massive old font.

Lady Worthington, standing rather in the background, could watch the faces of those around; Claude, with the gravely-wistful expression which his face often bore, stood close to the font, his colour rather high, his short, newly-grown hair fairer and more boyish-looking than ever. Espérance was close beside him, looking serene and happy, and with a beautiful light in her soft, brown eyes; while

behind them stood Marie, in her fresh white cap, and little Noel with his bright eyes full of grave wonder. On the opposite side stood Frances and Mr. Henderson, Madame Lemercier, using her handkerchief freely—Gaspard, with an unusually softened expression on his dark, handsome face, and Cornelia, holding the baby carefully and rather anxiously, with a womanly tenderness and love which she would once have scorned. But, perhaps, in all the little group there was no face which arrested Lady Worthington's attention with such real pleasure as the Dean's.

This Easter-Day was indeed one of rejoicing to him. It was with mingled humility and joy that he received his sister's little grandchild in his arms, and bestowed on her the name which meant so much to him—'Amy Espérance.'

The short service over, the little group dispersed quickly, Mrs. Mortlake lingering to help old Mrs. Passmore into the carriage, and to hear her comments.

'A most beautiful baby! the finest I have seen for a long time—and so healthy, too!'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Mortlake, 'a nice plump little thing, but scarcely pretty. Just compare her with Bella at that age! Bella really was a lovely baby.'

Mrs. Passmore did not stay to dispute the point, and Mrs. Mortlake was recalled to the present by finding that Bella was playing at snowballs with Maggie Henderson and the little Worthingtons, to the great detriment of her Sunday clothes.

There was to be no christening dinner, for Claude was still too much of an invalid to bear any more fatigue that day; it was not indeed till the evening that he was enough rested to care even for conversation, but when Espérance had brought him his tea he revived.

'It has not been too much for you?' she asked a little anxiously.

'Not the least. I wouldn't have missed it for anything,' he replied, with sufficient energy to reassure her. 'It was worth a little exertion if only for the pleasure of seeing the Dean's face.'

'Was it not bright and glad!' said Espérance, smiling. 'And he held baby so nicely! I could not help thinking as he said her name, how my mother's belief had really come true, and all was being made right at last. I wonder if in Paradise they are allowed to watch the working together of things down here—whether she and papa could see how the poverty and the suffering and the long waiting, were all leading up to the reunion which they had so longed for?'

Claude did not speak for a minute or two, but twisted her betrothal ring round, and mused on the motto.

'You naughty child,' he said, playfully, yet with a vibration in his voice, 'see how loose this thing has grown!'

And with that he pressed the little thin hand to his lips, and Espérance smiled—her eyes full of happy tears.

THE END.

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